

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

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ONE FAIR DAUGHTER

Triumphant Pilgrimage

AN ENGLISH MUSLIM'S JOURNEY
FROM SARAWAK TO MECCA

By
OWEN RUTTER

WITH TWO PORTRAITS

CHECKED - 1903



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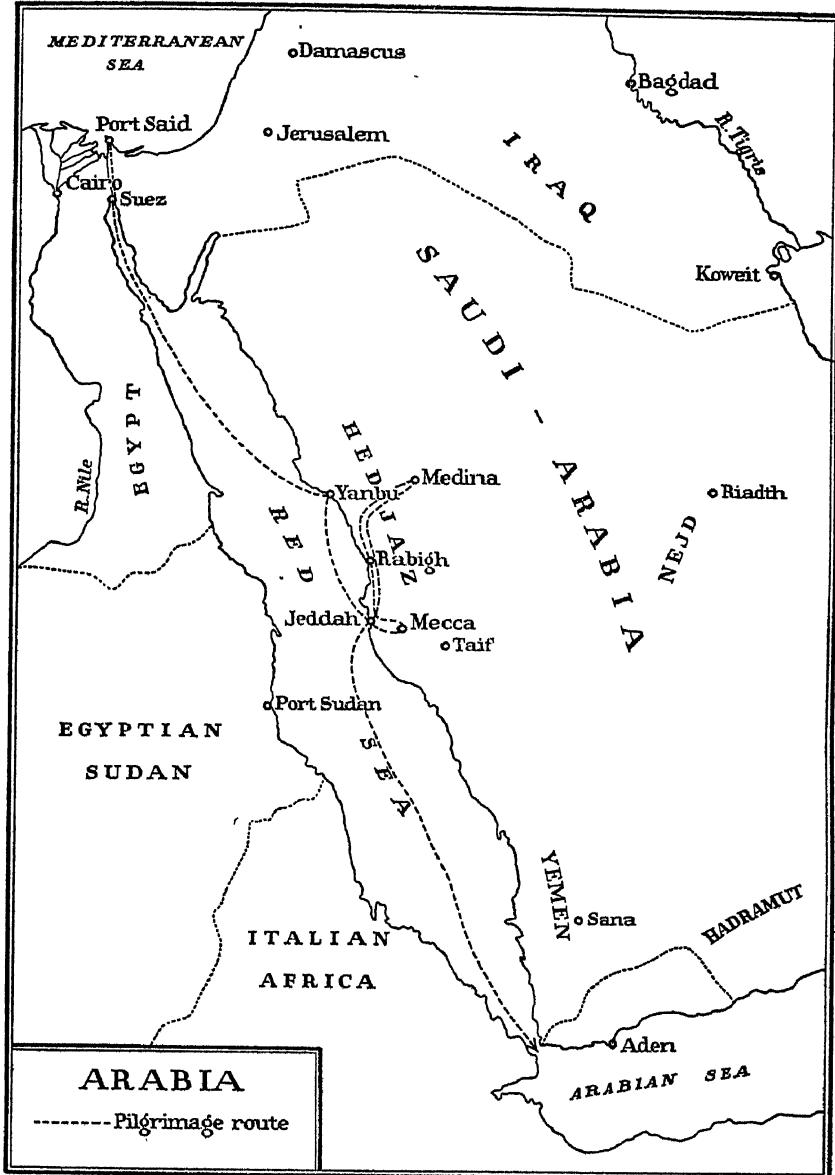
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KAPADA
AL-HAJA SA'ERAH
DENGAN SELAMAT SEJAHTERAAN-NYA

CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|----------------------------------|------|
| I. MEETING WITH CHALE | 11 |
| II. THE LESSON OF ISLAM | 23 |
| III. MUNIRAH | 48 |
| IV. THE SHEIKH SYSTEM | 69 |
| V. THE CONVERSION OF DAVID CHALE | 87 |
| VI. MUNIRAH TRANSFORMED | 105 |
| VII. VISA FOR JEDDAH | 121 |
| VIII. THE PILGRIM SHIP | 138 |
| IX. JEDDAH | 154 |
| X. KING IBN SAUD | 175 |
| XI. THE PILGRIM WAY | 201 |
| XII. THE MOTHER OF CITIES | 210 |
| XIII. THE PLAIN OF ARAFAT | 225 |
| XIV. THE FEAST OF THE HAJIS | 235 |
| XV. HOLY MEDINA | 251 |
| XVI. AMIN | 272 |
| MAP OF ARABIA | 9 |



Chapter I

MEETING WITH CHALE

QUAGLINO'S was full, but as David Chale and I entered the restaurant and Quaglino caught a glance from those queer eyes of Chale's he provided, promptly and without protest, the table which he keeps up his sleeve for special clients.

Chale is like that. He gets what he wants. Sometimes easily, sometimes with incredible difficulty, but sooner or later. There is nothing particularly remarkable about him at first sight. He is tall and lean and rather shabby. Dark-haired and pale, with long fingers, and a nose I always associate with King's Counsel: clear-cut and pointed, not easy to deter. But those glittering blue eyes of his are the features that hold you: narrow but very bright, restless but resolute, and curiously compelling. The eyes of a man who, once he knows what he wants, goes on until he gets it, no matter how much it costs him—or other people.

I had always felt that Chale's trouble was that he seldom knew what he did want. Whenever I had met him he struck me as an unsatisfied, jumpy creature. Nothing ever seemed enough for him. As soon as he got what he was after he would go off on another tack. I found him attractive but rather exhausting: one of those people who tend to drain one's vitality, a quality more common in women than in men. He had always given me the feeling that he was looking for something. That has a slightly irritating effect on me, just as when some one starts rummaging

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

about in the drawers of a writing-table for a letter he has mislaid.

So I had not been surprised when Chale resigned from the service of the Rajah of Sarawak. Those highly strung young men find it hard to fit in with the ordinary run of Government officers out East. They are too intelligent. They think too much. But he had stuck Sarawak for a good many years, and I knew that he was devoted to the Malays. Liked them better than the Europeans, people said nastily, and I am not sure that I blame him. Still, it seemed an odd change to give up the comparative freedom of running a district in Sarawak to come home and do a job of work in the City. That was his affair, not mine, but whenever I had run across him in London he had given me the impression that he would not stay put in Throgmorton Avenue for very long. I had not seen or heard of him for six months, and I wondered why he had suddenly asked me to luncheon in the way he had.

"I want to see you particularly," he had said over the telephone that morning. "It's very urgent."

"To-day?"

"Yes, lunch."

"It's rather difficult."

"Try and fix it. I've got something to tell you. It'll interest you." There was a pause, and then he added, "Something you might put in a book."

That is a bait which no writer can resist.

"All right," I said. "I'll work it."

"Good. Thanks. Then Quaglino's at one-fifteen."

That was as much as I knew until we had chosen our hors d'oeuvres. I could see that he was excited about something, but now that he had got me he did not know

MEETING WITH CHALE

where to begin. Tough though he is, there is nothing pompous about him, and one of his most likeable qualities is his diffidence.

"Well, how's life been using you?" I asked, to give him an opening.

He cocked his head on one side and looked at me quizzically with his bright eyes. Then his mouth curled into that attractive and disarming grin of his, creasing his lean and sallow cheeks.

"As a matter of fact, I've just got back from Mecca," he said.

"Mecca?"

"M'm."

"But I thought you were a stockbroker now?"

"So I am. All the same, I've been to Mecca."

"Done the pilgrimage, you mean?"

"Yes."

"You must have had a pretty grim time."

"I had a hell of a time. But I got there."

"I thought nobody but a Mohammedan could put his foot inside Arabia now?"

"Muslim," he corrected. "We don't like to be called Mohammedans."

I looked at him in amazement.

"We?"

"Yes, I am a Muslim."

"You mean you had to become one before you could get in?"

"No. I was one, and that's why I wanted to go on the Haj."

"You never told me you were."

"I only made my formal declaration of faith four

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

months ago," he told me. "But actually I'd been a Muslim at heart for years. I'd seen the power for good Islam was in those Malays' lives. It seemed to offer me something that I couldn't find in any other religion."

His shyness vanished. A strange exalted look came into his eyes.

"You know what it is," he went on. "The state one gets into out there. Nerves, and all that. There was I rushing about like a madman, up in the air one moment, down in the depths the next, and there were my Malays, calm and poised and dignified, accepting what came to them as the will of God. That's one of the things Islam teaches you: to be content with your lot. Christians are never satisfied. Always bleating for something they haven't got. I was like that. I needed peace of mind. Terribly. Islam offered me that."

He gave the waiter time to remove our plates and bring the lobster.

"There was more to it than that, even," he went on. "I went into it all very deeply. And the more I read and the more I learned from the Malays the more I felt that I might be able to do some good. When I first went out to Sarawak the Malays were all right. They were good Muslims. They went on the Haj. They observed their own customs, as James Brooke intended they should. But as time went on I could see their increasing contact with white men wasn't doing them any good. Aping European ways, and all that. Getting lax about their religion. Becoming ashamed of their perfectly good customs. D'you know what I mean?"

"I've seen it going on myself," I agreed. "It's a transition stage. Almost inevitable."

MEETING WITH CHALE

"I don't believe it is inevitable. It needn't be. Not if they had a lead in the right direction."

"And you wanted to give them a lead?"

"Yes. I tried to. Then I saw something bigger still. The essential teaching of Islam is peace, though most Europeans don't realize it. As a matter of fact the word "Muslim" means 'one at peace.' But the unity of Islam was menaced. It was being disunited by petty quarrels and jealousies. That seemed an appalling thing to me. Nearly as bad as what's happened to Christianity. I thought that perhaps I, as a European, might be able to help. Do something no Muslim has ever done. Make all Muslims understand that the strength of their religion lies in its old and magnificent simplicity. Wake them up so that they'd realize the world force for good lying dormant in their faith."

"That's big, if you like," I said.

"Yes, but what a chance! Now that I've been to Mecca I'm more convinced than ever. I tell you that place is like a gigantic cosmopolitan club. Turks, Chinese, Malays, Afghans, Syrians, Africans, are all friends and brothers there, one rubbing shoulders with the other. I never saw a row. Never heard a harsh word, even. How can they be brought together like that? Only by the power of Islam. And if Islam has that power in Arabia, why can't it be extended through the countries of the world?"

He regarded me with shining eyes, his lobster forgotten. Some people at the next table turned their heads and looked curiously at him.

"I suppose you think I'm crazy?" he said, flashing from excitement to a half-humorous calm.

"Not a bit," I answered.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

There seemed nothing else to say. I was experiencing that feeling of exhaustion his intenseness often gave me. I did not attempt to argue. I wanted him to go on.

"The trouble is, d'you see," he said, "Arabia herself hasn't kept pace with the Muslims who live under the guidance of European peoples. They've developed, but Arabia has stood still. Ibn Saud has worked marvels in making the country safe for pilgrims, but there's still a lot to be done. I thought I might help there, too."

"How?"

"D'y you realize that there are over a hundred million Muslims in the British Empire alone? Loyal and peace-loving citizens. We should have lost India years ago if it hadn't been for them. I tell you, we simply don't realize the power of that faith. Nor do the Muslims themselves. They look towards Mecca, but get no guidance from it."

"What do you want to do?"

"I felt that if I got an enlightened man like Ibn Saud on my side, persuaded him that a certain measure of progress was good for his country and his faith, Arabia might be a tremendous force for good. Just as Islam, once united, might be the greatest driving power for peace in the world."

"And you think you can bring about the change?"

"I do. I'm only at the beginning. I'm only just qualified to begin."

"So that's why you went on the pilgrimage?"

"Partly, yes. But first and foremost to fulfil myself. To satisfy my own religious scruples. You see, the five pillars of Islam require every Muslim to declare his faith in the oneness of God and in the apostleship of Mohammed, to pray five times a day, to give alms, to observe the fasting

MEETING WITH CHALE

month, and to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. It's difficult for a European, even some one like you who's lived out East, to realize the importance of the Haj in the mind of every Muslim. It's the one great aim of his life. Once a pilgrim gets to Mecca and has performed the rites his sins are forgiven and he starts afresh. You know that. But you can't know what a tremendous urge that is for every believer. You haven't the faintest idea of the satisfaction a man gets when he's been to Mecca and had that absolution. I've been through it, and I know. It's stupendous. I remember an Afghan saying to me on the Plain of Arafat, after the Haj was over, looking round at the huge crowd of pilgrims gathered there, 'Strange it may be, brother, but truly all these thousands whom God has blessed may be likened to hens' eggs newly laid.' That's it, d'you see? The chance of being able to start afresh. It's the most satisfying thing I've ever known."

He pointed a long forefinger at me, his head cocked on one side again.

"I'm telling you all this because I want you to understand that I didn't go to Mecca as a journalistic stunt. If I had, I shouldn't have got there. I should have broken down. But I was dead serious. I have been for years. It wasn't a matter of impulse. I knew what I was up against. I knew that even as a Muslim I should have to face suspicion and all kinds of difficulties. I was prepared for that. I'd thought about it for years, I tell you. That's why I chucked the service."

"Was that really necessary?"

"Yes. For two reasons. If I'd become a Muslim publicly they'd have booted me out. Wouldn't they?"

"I suppose they would."

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

"Well, then, I had to go. Also I had to make some money to do what I wanted to do. I couldn't make it in Sarawak."

"So that's why you went on the Stock Exchange?"

"Of course. You don't think I like it, do you? But I've been lucky. I made money. Enough to keep me going for a year, pay my fare out to Sarawak and back and the expenses of two passages to Mecca."

"Two?"

"Yes. I took my wife."

"Good Lord, I didn't know you were married!"

"I'd never have got there if I hadn't been."

"You mean she's a Malay?"

"M'm."

"You married a Malay and took her with you?"

"Yes. I had to."

"You've done something no other European has ever done before."

"I know. They're so suspicious of Europeans in Arabia nowadays that it was the only way of convincing them I was in earnest."

The remains of the lobster were taken away and some asparagus appeared. At least, I think it was asparagus. By that time I was too absorbed to take much interest in my food.

"Would you like to see what she looks like?" he asked.

"Of course."

From a portfolio he took a photograph by Lenare. According to Malay standards she was lovely, although that was not really the point.

"She's in London?" I asked.

"No. After the pilgrimage I took her back to Sarawak."

MEETING WITH CHALE

"Then how did Lenare take this photograph?"

"Because we had to come to London to get a visa for Jeddah. It's as hard as all that. And when we got to Jeddah the trouble hadn't started. It was absolute hell for a bit."

"But you did it?"

"Yes. And it was worth it. The biggest thing in my life. I'd have waited in Jeddah seven years to go."

He ordered coffee, and then turned to me and said abruptly:

"I'd like you to write the story. Will you?"

"Why don't you write it yourself?" I said.

"I don't want to. I can't write. But I'd like it put on record. I'd like you to do it. I can give you all the facts and I think they'll surprise you. It's a mighty queer place, Mecca."

"I don't see how I could without seeing the girl," I told him. "I can't very well go out to Sarawak to talk to her."

"That's all right," he said. "I'll fly out to Singapore and bring her back."

A month later he rang me up.

"Hullo, Chale here," said an incisive voice. "Got back last night. I've got Munirah. Come and dine with us to-night."

When I entered the sitting-room of Chale's flat Munirah was sitting beside the fire warming her hands, for the night was cold. She rose to greet me, smiling, perfectly at ease. She was a radiant creature. No child, but a mature woman, in the full blossom of loveliness, with a perfect skin, far fairer than most Malays I had known: her arms were not so dark as those of a sunburnt English girl. The

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

corners of her eyes curved faintly and deliciously upwards. The folds of her eyelids cast much more shadow than a European's and with her intensely black irises gave an accumulation of lovely darkness to her oval face. Her carmined lips were full and bow-shaped and when she smiled showed the whitest and most even teeth I have ever seen. I noticed that her nails were carefully manicured and polished, and a great black opal gleamed on one of her fingers. She was wearing a long silk sarong of dark blue with a golden border, and over her head and shoulders another of silver tissue which shimmered as she moved. Chale's room, with its Chinese vases and Borneo curios, Persian rugs and cloths of gold over the chairs, made a perfect setting for her.

As I began to talk to her I found with surprised delight that my Malay came back to me fluently, without my having to grope for words. That pleased her. We became friends at once. She was gay, but dignified. The poise and natural good manners of the Malay gave her a serenity when a European woman might have been awkward or ill-at-ease. She was all Malay, yet she was more, for she had the calm of the East which was in her nature and much of the self-possession of the well-bred European which in some way—how, I did not then quite know—he had acquired.

It was a memorable evening. At dinner Munirah's manners were perfect, although I knew she could not have used knives and forks for very long, and she played the hostess as though she had been doing it all her life. After dinner we sat by the fire, and talked and talked far into the night. I learned something of what they had been through. Chale had not exaggerated when he told me that

MEETING WITH CHALE

he had had a hell of a time; and Munirah had shared his humiliations and sustained his courage.

As I was getting into my coat in the hall Chale said:

“Well, will you take it on? I want you to.”

“Yes, I’d like to,” I said.

A week later we began, shutting ourselves up in Chale’s big sitting-room with its Eastern treasures. Chale, his restless eyes shining with excitement, crossing and uncrossing his legs, chin on fist, smoking cigarette after cigarette, telling the story of that strange experience, at times reliving it so intensely that he had to stop from sheer exhaustion. I, in a chair facing him, listening, examining and leading him like a witness, now elucidating, now letting him go his way. Now and then he would jump from incident to incident, like a man bounding along a rocky coast, while I tried to shape the narrative as I saw it growing in my mind. Sometimes I would stop him to put a question to Munirah, who sat on a low stool by the fire, listening to us. Sometimes she would take up the tale herself in Malay, with lovely gestures of her hands and cadences of her expressive voice, while I translated to Pamela Deverell, my secretary, who sat scribbling in her notebook all day long until her fingers ached so that we relented and let her rest.

So we went on, day after day, with brief intervals for meals, until the long tale was done. When it was over I felt that I had lived through an extraordinary experience. I pieced together the facts as they had been told me and wove them into a connected pattern. When the book was finished Chale vetted the manuscript, verifying every detail I had set down and correcting me in places where I

Chapter II

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

WHEN Chale first went out to Sarawak he was only eighteen: full young for the tropics. But even then he had a certain experience of the world. His father was the squire of a remote village in Wiltshire, a churchman of devout principles and conservative opinions. Chale had been brought up in a tensely religious atmosphere. He had accepted the beliefs and teachings of his father without question, as young children do, although not otherwise particularly tractable to parental authority. He must have been a serious-minded little boy, and when he left home for Osborne that habit of mind did not change. He was too self-critical ever to have been a prig, but he read his Bible and said his prayers as naturally as he brushed his teeth.

He passed through Osborne and Dartmouth, and went to sea as a midshipman at the end of the War. Up to a point he liked the life, but the discipline chafed his spirit and cramped his individuality. As time went on he felt this more and more acutely. The whole system began to stifle him. To be smothered is as an abominable form of death as is possible to imagine, but spiritual suffocation is worse than physical, and is a species of mental torture insupportable to a certain type of man.

The end of it was that he left the Navy. It was not that he lacked either courage or determination, but he had enough vision, even at that age, to see that he would never

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

be a success in the service, and that if he was to do anything with his life he must get out in time.

His father, although disappointed, accepted the situation, and found him a job in a shipping office. The idea of being a free agent in London appealed to Chale at first, but he soon found that office-life was worse than the daily round in a battleship. He was still "messed about" by other people, as he described it, and that, above all else, was what he had come to hate. He was little better than an office-boy, at the beck and call of everyone, particularly of the manager, a pompous person called Mudford, who wore a heavy gold albert slung across his belly, and had a ragged moustache which flapped slightly every time he breathed.

Chale came to detest Mudford, although he had to admit that the man was harmless enough and did not treat him at all badly. But one of Chale's duties was to take Mudford his afternoon cup of tea. He resented having to do this. It seemed to him the very epitome of servitude. Every day he grew more incensed. That cup of tea, with the two Marie biscuits propped in the saucer against the cup, became the symbol of his abasement.

At last he decided that he would stand it no longer. He made up his mind to go. But instead of handing in his notice he did what every man in that office would have liked to do, but did not dare. At four o'clock one Friday afternoon he took the cup as usual, walked into the manager's office without knocking, marched across the room, and without a word flung the tea splosh into Mudford's face.

"I had to," he told me in explanation. "There was simply nothing else to do."

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

Mudford was so astounded that he did not say a word. His lips moved, but no sound came. Later, he said a lot. And that was the end of Chale's career in shipping.

After that he returned to Wiltshire, and there met a friend of his father's, Wellaby-Piggott, who had retired from Sarawak some twenty years before. He liked Wellaby-Piggott, who was a hard-living old-timer of the Eastern tropics, patted his liver in the mornings, and had an infinite capacity for drinking whisky all day. He was the last survivor of that band of Englishmen who had served under James Brooke and enjoyed giving their services free for two years during the lean times which followed the Chinese insurrection. He told Chale glowing tales of life in Sarawak. He talked of the romance of the Brooke rule, that remarkable autocracy, the issue of English principle blended with Oriental practice, born in England but grown independent. He spoke of the freedom of a Sarawak officer's life, of travelling up and down great rivers in canoes, of shooting rapids, of foot-slogging through jungle, of fishing and shooting. He mentioned the charm and good manners of the Sarawak Malays. When well primed he would tell tales of Dayak head-hunters and pirates.

Chale's imagination was fired. He looked up Sarawak in Chambers's *Encyclopædia*, and read that the rivers, lakes, and lagoons swarmed with crocodiles. That did not deter him. The idea of running a district in such a place appealed to him enormously. As Wellaby-Piggott said, it was a free life. He would be unfettered by the trammels of civilization. He would be able to shoot where he liked without fear of trespassing and poaching. It seemed just the job he had been looking for, and he persuaded

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Wellaby-Piggott to give him a nomination for the Rajah's service. He went up before the Sarawak Advisory Council, a body of jovial old-timers who met once a week in London. But this was merely a formality because (as he learned afterwards) the Rajah had already instructed the Council to accept him. Two months later he arrived in Kuching, the Rajah's capital.

At that time the State of Sarawak had been under the Brooke dynasty for ninety years. When James Brooke secured the territory from the Sultan of Brunei and became the first Rajah, he promised to administer it in accordance with the will of the native inhabitants. He undertook to respect and uphold the faith and code of the Muslim Malays of the coastal regions, and the tribal customs of the Dayaks and other pagan tribes of the interior, in so far as those customs were not abhorrent to the principles of humanity.

Those promises were honoured by himself and by his successor, Charles Brooke. Both Rajahs were determined to save the natives, whom they loved, from being exploited by self-seeking Europeans. They made no attempt to develop the country wholesale by the introduction of capital, even in the days of the rubber boom in 1910, when vast tracts of land might easily have been sold to commercial companies. The Brooke tradition was to hold Sarawak in trust for its people, however loudly progress might come knocking at the door, and to administer it for them on feudal lines under their own chiefs in co-operation with European officers, who were expected to remain at their posts for ten years without leave, to identify themselves with the native outlook, and to refrain from marrying during their first term of duty.

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

When Chale joined the service the new Rajah, Vyner Brooke, had recently succeeded his father, and every one assumed that he would follow the example of his predecessors. Although Sarawak enjoyed the benefits of British protection from outside aggression, its internal administration was independent. The Rajah was recognized as an Oriental potentate and received his salute of twenty-one guns whenever he entered Singapore Harbour. The British Government had the right to appoint a Consul to Sarawak, but not an Adviser or Resident. Within his territory the Rajah was one of the few autocratic rulers left in the world, with absolute power of life and death over his subjects. But he was a benevolent autocrat who exercised his power with wisdom and restraint, and had at heart the democratic principle. He was accessible to all his subjects, of whatever creed. Rich man or poor, widow or orphan, could lay a grievance before him personally. Every day he sat, as his predecessors had sat before him, at a table placed in the centre of a small office in each of whose four walls was an open door. No guards restrained the company of silent subjects who sat cross-legged or squatted, chewing betel, patiently waiting their turn to enter, and the Rajah never left until he had seen the last one of them. Beloved by his people, like James and Charles Brooke before him, he acknowledged Islam as the State religion; with such liberality that when ceremonies had to be performed, such as the blessing of the Sarawak Rangers' colours, it was the Muslim Imam who took precedence of the Anglican Bishop of Sarawak in officiating at the consecration.

Up to the end of the War the system had worked well. There had never been any serious unrest. Propaganda

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

against the Government and demands for nationalism were unknown, and if the natives of Sarawak had few opportunities to improve their condition or to educate their children, they retained their simplicity and their mode of life which had been sanctified by custom, so dear to the Malay heart. Because they knew no better, for the most part they lived contentedly, as loyal subjects of the Rajah under their chiefs, who in turn were subject to the English Residents and District Officers. The resources of their rich country remained undeveloped and unheeded and they were unaware of the value of their heritage.

The years which succeeded the War brought aspirations and a change of outlook to many native peoples. Isolation had left Sarawak untouched by the general unrest. But when Chale reached the territory there were at work subtle, though not disloyal, influences of which he was not sufficiently experienced to take cognizance at once.

He spent a few days in Kuching getting the hang of the general system of administration. Then he was sent to one of the out-stations to learn the Malay language and the working of a district under a Resident.

He had taken an instinctive liking to the country and he was immensely keen, with energy like a driving wind. He was delighted to get out to a district, and although he did not much care for the idea of working under anyone he had the wit to realize that he must go through the necessary stages of training which would entitle him to be given a district of his own. The process of breaking in young officers was a hard one. It was sound enough for cadets who needed licking into shape, but Chale had been through all that in the Navy. He was not a man to be licked into shape, though his superior officers did not

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

realize it. He was so intensely individual that what he needed was delicate moulding, not rough handling, which, while it may have a stiffening effect on weak characters, is apt to turn strong men into rebels. But he determined not to repeat his tea-throwing exploit. He was ambitious to get on, and knew that once he had a district of his own he would be all right. So he swallowed caustic remarks with as good a grace as he could, worked hard at his Malay, studied native customs, and read a chapter of his Bible every night.

As weeks went by he found himself becoming more and more attracted to the Malays. He liked their good manners and their cheerful friendliness, which was neither familiar nor servile. The only thing about them that faintly irritated him was their philosophical outlook upon life, their calm acceptance of destiny. To a man of his restless and energetic temperament this attitude seemed spineless and apathetic: you could never get anywhere, he felt, if you just took everything unpleasant that came to you as the will of God without trying to do anything about it. His idea had always been that a man must carve his own life and surmount obstacles, instead of tamely submitting to them.

Then something happened that made him wonder if he were right.

A Malay called Sabtu, who lived in a village near the station, took a fancy to the native wife of a Chinese shop-keeper, stuck a kris into the man while he was asleep and bolted into the jungle with the girl.

In a country like Sarawak a man who becomes an outlaw can cause grievous trouble and is very difficult to catch. He always has a certain number of friends who are

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

prepared to help him surreptitiously, and even those who are against him are afraid of giving him away. Sabtu eluded capture by keeping on the move, terrorized the villagers by making sudden raids upon their houses for food, and finally held up his own headman and walked off with two hundred dollars, which the old man was too scared to refuse.

The whole countryside was in a turmoil, and Chale was given half a dozen Sarawak Rangers and ordered to bring Sabtu in. After several failures to arrest his man he finally tracked him down to a hut in the jungle, rushed it in person, and brought his prisoner back in triumph.

The higher authorities were afraid Sabtu might escape from the station lock-up, and some special stocks were made of the heavy Borneo ironwood. Sabtu's legs were thrust into the holes and shackled as well; his wrists were handcuffed behind his back, so that he could scarcely move. He was kept in the lock-up, which was built between the posts under the court-house, and there he remained in solitary confinement for weeks until the case came on. The only time he ever had any fresh air was when he was taken out once a month and washed with the fire-hose.

Chale had no brief for murderers, but his sympathy was always with the under-dog, and he thought such precautions unnecessary. Unwisely, perhaps, he said so, but so far from his expostulations having any effect he was given orders to sleep in the court-house at night. A hole had been cut in the floor, and Chale had to look through it every hour to make sure that the prisoner was still in the lock-up below.

Those hours of watching became a sort of nightmare.

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

The mere fact that he stuck it out and obeyed orders shows how his character had strengthened. To him the most harrowing part was that Sabtu never uttered a word of complaint, never made a single plea for mercy. But as Chale lay listening in the darkness he would hear, now and again, a tortured voice below him grunt out "Allah-u-Akbar"—"God is the Greatest!" Just that, and then silence. He used to lie awake, waiting for those words. When they came they wrung his heart, yet at the same time gave him a measure of relief. But he could not sleep. He just lay there on his camp-bed listening for the words to come again.

The case was put up for trial at last, and Sabtu was sentenced to death. Since Government was afraid that Sabtu might escape if he were sent down to Kuching, it was arranged that the execution should take place on the spot. The death-warrant, signed by the Rajah, was sent up, and Chale was despatched to the golf-course, three miles from the station, to nail cross-pieces to the tree against which Sabtu was to be shot, and to erect two posts and a cross-bar for the Rangers to rest their rifles on, so that they might take careful aim.

Sabtu was prepared for execution by a final washing with the fire-hose. Then he was marched along the road to the golf-course, handcuffed to a policeman on either side and guarded by the execution party of Rangers. He could hardly walk, because his legs had been three months in the stocks. Chale had to lead the way, and a crowd of natives and Chinese brought up the rear. The Malays were silent, the Chinese cackling and triumphant. Government had proclaimed that the execution was to be public, as a warning to others, and even Chinese women went

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

hobbling after the party on their bound feet, their little shoes leaving a spoor of strange-shaped holes in the mown grass bridle-path as they tottered along.

When they reached the tree the corporal removed Sabtu's calico prison-coat, and with a piece of chalk drew a circle of six inches radius upon his dark-brown chest. Sabtu winced as the bull's-eye was drawn over the heart and filled in. Then the Rangers stretched out his arms and legs and strapped them to the cross-bars. Chale could see that there was no need for that last indignity. Sabtu was exhausted by the march, but completely calm, and was prepared to meet his death with fortitude and composure, but Government orders left no alternative. Sabtu made no protest.

The Dayak Rangers were stout-hearted enough in a fight, and they were not Muslims, yet Chale saw that they did not care about their job. One man's teeth were chattering. The barrels of their rifles made a knocking sound against the cross-bar. But on the word of command they prepared to fire. Chale heard Sabtu mutter "Allah-u-Akbar" for the last time. There was a ragged report. Some of the bullets may have missed, but Sabtu had enough lead in him to kill him. Chale saw that he was dead. The corporal drew his knife and cut the bonds from the limbs. The body fell huddled to the ground, with uplifted face and staring eyes.

I have related this episode exactly as Chale told it to me, sitting in his London flat. Even after all that time he was intensely moved as he recreated the scene. I have no reason whatever to doubt its truth, but I have set it down in no spirit of animadversion on the Sarawak methods of administration. It is not for me to judge the rights and

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

wrongs of such a case. Order had to be kept in a vast district with a handful of Dayak police. Sabtu was a dangerous man, with a certain following. Had he escaped the whole district would have been in an uproar and he might have done inestimable harm before he was caught again. I do not propose to criticize the methods of keeping Sabtu secure and seeing that the death-warrant was duly executed. All that is unimportant to the purpose of this narrative. What is important is the effect it had upon Chale's mind.

He was at an impressionable age, and, right or wrong, the whole affair had sickened him with disgust. For weeks after the execution he would lie awake at night listening for that low mutter of "Allah-u-Akbar," as it had come up to him from the gaol beneath his bed. He thought of Sabtu lying there in those stocks day after day, night after night, without complaint. How had he done it? What had sustained him? No European could have borne as much without breaking. Yet Sabtu had never broken. Even on the long tramp in the blazing sun to the place of execution he had maintained his dignity.

Chale forgot that the man was a murderer and a robber. He could think of nothing but his magnificent courage. Sabtu had shown him something he had never known before. He had seen men in adversity. He had seen them go under cursing their luck and he had seen them facing danger with a smile. But he had never seen a man enduring prolonged torture in conditions that made him squirm to think about, and endure it with a calm resignation that had not faltered once.

What was the truth of it? That was the question he kept turning over and over in his mind. What would he

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

himself have done? He knew that he could not have behaved as Sabtu had. Then what had given the man that strength? It was not insensitiveness. By that time Chale knew enough about the Malays to realize that they are the most sensitive race in the world. He had seen their hatred of ridicule, their pride, their shamed abasement under humiliation, actual or imaginary. And what humiliation Sabtu had suffered! Spiritual agony as well as physical pain. Yet he had remained undaunted.

Then Chale saw the answer. That patient acceptance of destiny which at first had irritated him was in fact not the Malays' weakness but their strength. Sabtu could have drawn his courage from one source and one only: from his faith, which enjoined submission not to man but to God.

That was the beginning of Chale's serious interest in Islam. Shortly after Sabtu's execution he was given a district of his own. There he was, to all intents and purposes, his own master, as he had longed to be. A District Officer in Sarawak has to be a jack-of-all-trades and master of most of them. Besides being responsible for the general administration of his district he has, as a police officer, to keep order and, when necessary, to arrest criminals. As magistrate he must try the case, acting as prosecutor, defending counsel and judge at the same time. If he fines the accused he must account for the money as treasurer; if he orders him a whipping he must superintend the infliction of the punishment; if he sentences him to imprisonment he is responsible for the man's confinement as inspector of the local gaol, while as postmaster he makes up the mail which takes the report of the case to head-

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

quarters. Besides all that he spends much of his time travelling about the district, settling land disputes, dispensing medicine to the sick, listening to tales of erring wives and failing rice-crops, preventing headhunting, and acting as the guide, philosopher, and friend of all his people.

It is a full life and a varied one, and it enables a man to gain an insight into many aspects of native society. But it is hard work, and the keener a man is the greater the strain the loneliness and the climate impose upon his nerves, particularly if he possesses a highly strung temperament like Chale's.

After the Sabtu affair Chale came to identify himself more and more with the Malays. The pagans did not appeal to him in the same way. He felt that the Malays had something neither the pagans nor the Europeans had, and he was determined to find out what it was. So he poked that sharp nose of his into their affairs, never intrusively, but with increasing sympathy and understanding. Their sensitive natures enabled them to recognize his good breeding and sensibility—no people can detect a cad quicker than Malays—and since his good manners and scrupulousness as to the finer points of etiquette matched theirs, he never did anything to hurt their feelings or to offend their sense of fitness, as many Europeans, even with the best intentions, are apt to do when dealing with a race whose attitude to life is so completely alien to their own.

Chale succeeded in getting a proper perspective to that attitude. He was never annoyed by what his brother officers were apt to call the Malays' laziness. To him their disinclination to labour more than they need showed a proper appreciation of leisure. When necessity arose they

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

could carry through any plan or project they undertook with unflinching resolution. Their rice-fields, their sago factories, their elaborate fish-traps, their trim palm-leaf houses, their well-stocked gardens and their serviceable boats were evidence of their industry. But it seemed to Chale that instead of striving and struggling like Europeans in desperate competition for possessions they did not need, they utilized the time left over from the obligatory labours of life in giving self-expression to their creative impulses and instinctive feeling for craftsmanship, or to the enjoyment of good talk or solitary contemplation —that form of relaxation which has been forgotten in the West.

But what came to attract Chale even more strongly was their patience, their forbearance, their modesty, and their calm acceptance of the facts of life and death. Distress and poverty never disturbed them. He envied them their peace of mind.

It was not as though they were a passive race and never moved to anger. By nature they were a passionate people. But they had control of their faculties. Again and again Chale saw a man subdue his anger in a few minutes by fingering his string of mother-of-pearl beads and repeating “Al-hamdu-lillah”—“All praise is due to God,” and he came to understand that Islam exercised its influence upon every action of their lives.

Then there was another aspect which gave him food for thought. He became tremendously impressed with the cleanliness of the Malays as compared with the filthiness of the pagans, and reflected that no other religion, with the exception of Judaism, had taught the poorer classes the law of cleanliness, so essential to dwellers in hot

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

countries. The houses of the Malays were clean, since they were built on posts above the water, and the tide washed the ground beneath them every day. By the law of Islam they kept no pigs, which, as Chale knew from his travels among the up-country villages, were disgusting creatures in the East, eating any filth, human, animal, or vegetable, and even rooting up graves to batten upon the bodies of the dead. Also, Islam laid down specific rules for bodily cleanliness so that every man, woman, and child bathed twice a day. He learned that Europeans disgusted the Malays by their goat-like smell, due to their eating quantities of meat and not shaving under the arms.

He took to reading the Koran, and came to appreciate the teaching which provided both a religious and a civil code. He also recognized Mohammed's liberality of mind. Mohammed had not tried to destroy other religions, but had shown that they were incompatible with the requirements of his own people. Above all, it was the simplicity of Islam which appealed to Chale. As he saw it, the Koran did not attempt to set out new ideas, but only to proclaim the oneness of God. Its simplicity was eminently suited to the requirements of simple people. It was unburdened with dogma or doctrines that were contrary to logic or reason. A Muslim could avow his faith without playing traitor to his intelligence. There was no need, Chale felt, for the heart and head to travel different paths.

As he read on there seemed no phase of life left uncovered by the Koran's teaching. There were laws which provided for its believers' spiritual welfare, their fear and love of God, their tolerance, their humility, their courtesy, their respect for parents, and their charitableness to the poor.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

He thought of the Europeans he knew in the East: how little their religion really meant to them. Far less than it did to him, and he himself of recent years had begun to be mazed by a cloud of doubt, not by Christ's teaching, which he could accept in all its sublime simplicity, but by the dogma of the Churches. But Muslims accepted Islam as a whole, as a code of practical ethics and a guide to the conduct of daily life. All the Muslims he met had an unshakeable belief in the truth and efficacy of their faith. It was a living force to them, as he saw for himself every day, and exercised a profound influence not only on their spiritual but on their social lives. It had adapted itself to the requirements and character of a people who dwelt in a land far distant from its birthplace. It had done the same in other lands whose people had far different characteristics. To Chale it seemed impressive that when the Arabs had come preaching Islam to the East Indies five hundred years before, it had made so swift and impressive an appeal that the whole people had then and there accepted its teaching and had forthwith submitted their lives to be governed by its five basic laws.

Chale studied these five pillars of Islam. In the simple declaration of belief in the oneness of God and in the apostleship of Mohammed he saw a wise realization of man's moral need of a plain statement of belief. The assertion that Christ was the Son of God had often worried him. Ever since he had begun to think out spiritual matters for himself he had found it difficult to accept the doctrine of the Trinity. Mohammed had never claimed to be divine. He had taught that there was but one God, and that he, and Christ also, were but prophets of God.

Then there was the matter of prayer. It seemed to Chale

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

that the mass of mankind could never be satisfied if merely told to pray. It needed guidance and teaching. The human mind was so constituted that it craved for rules to obey. Christianity had no set times or forms of individual prayer. Mohammed had met the need by providing a daily order of prayer which fulfilled spiritual requirements and disciplined the physical body. Five times a day men and women would abandon whatever they were doing to pray. Chale had seen his boatmen stop even in the middle of a rapid to offer up the customary midday prayer.

He found that the same set teaching applied to material matters. Mohammed had accepted the fact that there must always be an unequal distribution of worldly goods on earth, but lest the rich should become callous to the sufferings of the poor he required all Muslims to observe a periodical fast. To that end he ordained that during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim year, no man or woman might taste food or drink between sunrise and sunset. There was no discrimination between rich and poor, fortunate and unfortunate. But since the poor were accustomed to such privations, it was the rich who must feel their effects in greater measure and so, by appreciating the lot of their humbler brethren, become compassionate and be ready to obey the third law, that of zakat, the obligatory payment of an annual poor rate, whereby the poor and needy were assisted by the charity of the rich. This law was laid down by the Koran so that man might not be too prone to amass wealth at the expense of his obligations towards society. There were no tax-collectors to enforce it, yet Chale saw for himself that it was obeyed. The knowledge that every Malay in his district, whatever his standing, parted annually with at least two and a half

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

per cent. of the capital value of his worldly possessions for the benefit of the general good was a source of continual amazement to him, at a time when the Governments of the world were striving to find means to encompass the more equitable distribution of wealth, while Islam had been able to enforce a simple system which had been working satisfactorily for over a thousand years.

But to Chale none of the laws of Islam showed a greater appreciation of man's needs than the command to every Muslim to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his lifetime. Chale was coming himself to learn that every human being needs an earthly goal which can be reached only with difficulty and hardship. For Muslims that goal was Mecca. It took the place of the Europeans' ambition to acquire riches, position or power, and, as Chale had repeated evidence, was infinitely more satisfying. He had read the exhortation in the Koran : "Proclaim among men the pilgrimage. Let them come to you on foot and on every fleet camel, from every remote part . . ."

That command he saw being continually obeyed. Living as he did amongst the Malays, he constantly heard them talking of the pilgrimage. It was a topic of daily conversation. Its importance to them could not be overestimated. He heard men, women, even children, speaking of the day when they would be able to go. He saw the plans, the preparations, the sacrifices, that were necessary before a pilgrim could set out on so long and so difficult a journey. He watched parties of pilgrims embarking for Singapore on their way to Mecca. He greeted those who returned, and heard the tales of their experiences, to which their comrades in the village never tired of listening. Among all the people in whose midst he lived the pilgrim-

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

age was the peak of earthly hopes and prayers. He came to understand something of the intense spiritual satisfaction of entering the holy shrine and performing the ritual and ceremonies which cleansed the human soul from sin and enabled it to start upon a fresh journey, like a cloth that has been wrung clean in clear water. He knew that no Muslim could have a higher ambition than to die in the Mother of Cities, which recognized no distinction of colour, or of race, or of station, where black, white, and brown arrived from all parts of the earth's surface, bereft of the trappings of lineage, wealth, or worldly honours, dressed in two white seamless garments, and merging into one fraternal whole. There, felt Chale, might be seen God's conception of true democracy on earth.

He was in such close contact with his people that he saw all the processes of Islam at work. He was able to judge their results, and they impressed him enormously. Of course, he was intelligent and critical enough to examine the other side. He learned enough to realize after a while that Islam was not the religion of fatalism he had supposed it to be. As his Malay friend, Mohammed Ali, pointed out to him, the very meaning of the word Islam meant peace and submission to God, but submission in the sense of conforming to the divine law. Chale had to admit that the Malays he knew had as much free will as he had. Like himself, they were architects of their own fate. But the final aim of a Muslim was to be at one with God. "From God we come, to God we go, to be absorbed in him." That, Mohammed Ali taught him, was the Muslim heaven, a place without location and beyond space or time, and not a sensual paradise inhabited by houris and flowing with milk and honey. The word-pictures in

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

the Koran were no more to be taken literally than the allegories of the Old Testament.

But one defect he did see in Islam was that the very guidance it offered for every occasion tended to cramp man's individuality. That seemed important to him, individualist as he was. He said as much to Mohammed Ali.

"Does the ant wish to work alone?" asked the old man.
"Can the bee swarm without his comrades?"

Yes, that was it, thought Chale. The greater part of mankind were gregarious. They had no desire to emerge from the crowd. They wanted not to lead but to be led: and as much in European countries as in the East. One had to go through hell within oneself to get free. Islam—any religion for that matter—was for the mass. Only the exceptionally strong character could show its individuality: but that was so elsewhere.

All this study, these questions, these verdicts, were a matter of months, even years. But the longer Chale lived among the Malays the stronger did Islam's appeal become to him. Again and again he found himself coming back to the one point which had at first attracted him: the Muslims' peace of mind.

In course of time the Rajah had put him in charge of native affairs in Sarawak. He had unusual opportunities of meeting and studying the most intelligent Malays. By the feudal nature of the Rajah's administration, each day he was brought into contact with chiefs and charlatans, rich and poor, exalted and humble, and he observed that all seemed happy and at peace, despite the vagaries of their lives.

He was working tremendously hard, on an average

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

eighteen hours a day; he was always on the go, always extended. Naturally he became nervous and irritable, more jumpy than ever. His early interest in Islam had been dispassionate and purely academic. Now he began to wonder if it could give him, too, peace of mind.

He needed religion: such was his cast of thought. Of late years the faith he had learned so unquestioningly from his father had proved to be unsatisfying. The conditions in which he was living, and his newly acquired experience, made it impossible for him to accept many of those old beliefs: and he knew that he must accept all or nothing.

Yet, waver though he might, those old ingrained beliefs still held him. Islam attracted him, yet he shrank from it. For a long time the thought of becoming a Muslim made him feel like a traitor: to Christianity, to his race, to his father.

Nevertheless, he must have a faith to sustain him—a vital faith. Then he asked himself if he could accept Islam as a whole. It too must be all or nothing, or he would be worse off than before. He suffered intense conflict of mind. He found it impossible to break away, yet in his stress and his loneliness he had acute need of spiritual satisfaction. He had no one of his own faith to talk to about a subject so intimate; no one to give him counsel. Probably the advice of another would have made no difference to his ultimate decision, but it might have helped to clarify his mind.

This spiritual conflict lasted many months. What helped him to make up his mind was a sinister change he saw coming over the lives of the Malays. In the course of his work he travelled from one district to another. In those which lay far from the centres of so-called civilization and

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

European life the Malays led simple lives, dictated by their faith and their customs, as their forefathers had lived before them. But in Kuching the foundations of native society were no longer so firm. He became convinced that the change was due to the Malays' increased contact with Europeans, who were setting a bad example by maintaining a higher standard of luxury in their own homes and lives than hitherto. It was natural that the Malays, who had always regarded Europeans as their equals and not their superiors, should seek to emulate the new order. But the traditional Brooke policy had precluded the development of the territory's resources and the education of the Malays upon European lines. Thus the shock of contact with a new and extravagant order was too great for them to absorb, nor had they the wealth to enable them to adopt the new standard of life. The result was social instability. Chale saw the Malays becoming lax in religious observances. The chiefs were beginning to neglect their own good customs. They were taking to using knives and forks, drinking spirits, wearing European clothes. Well-born Malay girls, who once would have preferred death to liaisons with unbelievers, were becoming the mistresses of white men, only to be cast off at the whim of their masters after a month or two. Every year fewer pilgrims were going on the Haj. The Malays seemed to be acquiring an inferiority complex which was completely alien to their natures. They had been accustomed to look upon Government officers as men of advanced education. They had liked them and respected them. They had been prepared to accept their leadership, but it had been the leadership of equals in status and differing only in degree of learning.

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

Since the War the pay of the Government officers had been increased, leave to England had been accelerated, men could marry much earlier than before. It seemed to Chale that the deterioration of the native had begun with the arrival of an increased number of European women. In the old days, he knew, the wives of officials had identified themselves with the country and with their husbands' work. They had behaved with a sense of dignity and responsibility that had earned them the love and respect of the natives. But he saw that many of the post-War type took little interest in their surroundings, and none in the natives. They were concerned mainly with gratifying their craving for amusement. There was an increase in social life which was widening the gulf, so that the official was in danger of losing touch with his people. To make matters worse, the women's attitude was that the natives were inferior beings. This had its effect upon the natives' minds, so that they began to copy European ways, and thus the whole structure of society seemed to be undermined by a creeping change.

Chale began to be afraid that a great ideal was in danger of being shattered. The Brooke tradition had been that Sarawak belonged to its people, not to its rulers. The Rajah and his officers had laboured for the natives, not for themselves. Rulers and ruled had been linked by ties of deep attachment; and now, it seemed, the ties were weakening and change was touching both.

He knew the Rajah to be a liberal-minded man, easy-going, genial, popular with all. But whereas his predecessors had been fighters, whose wits had been sharpened by adversity and criticism, his own reign had been so prosperous that he had benefited by no such

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

chastening. He was earnestly trying to uphold the tradition of his father and great-uncle, but it seemed to Chale that while he devoted himself to considering the needs and petty grievances of individual natives, he was less concerned with matters of vital importance to the welfare of his subjects as a whole. He had abandoned the four-doored office of his predecessors, thereby making himself less accessible to his people, while they, lacking guidance, were turning from the simple customs and mode of life which in other days had been the foundation of their own and their Rajah's strength.

Chale became deeply perturbed. He loved the Malays. They were his friends. He saw the menace to their future. Only one thing could save them : their faith.

As things were, he could do nothing. As a Christian, he knew that he could have little real influence on them for good. But he saw that if he were to become a Muslim he would not only satisfy his own spiritual needs but by the force of his own example might bring them back to a true appreciation of the teaching of Islam which in the past had blended so well with the aims of those who administered their land.

Even so, his decision was not made in a day. He realized the immense difficulties which lay before him. He knew that it would be impossible to keep his conversion secret, and that once the truth came out he would have to resign the service. He could not look to the Rajah for any support, whatever his secret sympathies might be. European opinion in Sarawak would be too strong. That would defeat his object. Moreover, he could not afford to lose his job. His wish was to go on the Haj, and he knew that no Muslim would have full confidence in him until he had

THE LESSON OF ISLAM

returned. To do that one needed money, and he had very little of his own.

Week after week this conflict lasted. Then one evening, as he sat on the veranda of his house watching the sun setting behind the forest of mangosteen-trees across the river, suddenly he saw his way. It came to him quite clearly, like a message. He must resign the service, go back to England, make some money, and then return. It would mean waiting, but that did not greatly matter. By that time he had absorbed the patience of the East.

Chapter III

MUNIRAH

I DID not press Chale about the events of the next three years. The details were not important. I knew that he had knocked about a good deal, and had finally become a remisier in the City. He was in touch with a great many people and was able to introduce good business to his firm, so that he made a satisfactory commission, but besides that he speculated on his own account. Contangoing stocks and shares is as insidious a form of gambling as man has ever devised: the gains are quick, but the losses are even quicker, and a man without a large capital behind him may easily be cleaned out in a week. But Chale gambled shrewdly. He began in a small way. He had good information, he went long or short at just the right times, and always, or nearly always, got out too soon; which is another way of saying that he nailed his profits to the wall. Of course, he had setbacks occasionally, but he stuck to it until he had accumulated enough to see him through what he wanted to do.

That is the significant point: that, and the fact that he never lost sight of his purpose, as some men might have done once they were back in England and free from the abnormal life of a white man in the tropics. So far from weakening in his resolve, it became the driving force of his life.

When he was ready there was nothing to prevent him making his formal declaration of faith in England. But

he knew that he would gain the confidence of his Malay friends more surely if he became converted to Islam in Sarawak and set off on the pilgrimage from Singapore. He was still on friendly terms with the Rajah, and it was quite easy to say that he wanted to go out again to visit old friends and to study local conditions for a book he had in mind.

His return naturally caused considerable speculation among the European community of Kuching. His close association with the Malays and his aloof habit of life had never won him popularity, so that some people went about saying that he was up to no good. Others suggested that he had come out to try and wheedle a concession from the Rajah for some wild-cat scheme. It suited him to encourage them. He went so far as to drop hints that he thought of starting an air service from Singapore to Kuching.

Nobody guessed his real purpose—none of the Europeans, that is. Naturally the Malays knew what was in the wind. But although Malays talk among themselves they are adepts at discreetly keeping Europeans in the dark when need be, and Chale let it be known that he did not want his intentions broadcast until he was ready.

He wanted to take his time. He had not been back in Kuching a week before he saw that during his absence the tendencies which had disturbed him three years previously had become more ominous, particularly among the younger generation. The Malays needed a lead more than ever, and he was the more resolutely determined to give them one.

And by that time he had conceived a wider purpose. While in England he had read and studied much and his

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

ideas had clarified. The Malays were but a comparatively small group of a whole. It seemed to him that in every one of the great religions the catholic teaching of the Master had been disintegrated by those who followed him. It had been so with the teaching of Buddha and of Christ, and, as he saw now, it was beginning with the teaching of Mohammed. The vision of Mohammed had been a great brotherhood banded together by the lessons of the Koran. Islam had not been split up into denominations as Christianity had, yet for centuries it had been divided into four main groups, founded by the orthodox leaders, Imams Hanbal, Malik, Hanifa, and Shafi, who, after the death of the Prophet, interpreted his teaching in different ways.

As Chale had discovered, the distribution of these four schools of thought is mainly geographical and racial rather than intellectual. None of them differs from another in fundamentals, but each has certain variations in its interpretation of the Koran and its details of religious practice. For example, if a member of the Shafi sect who has performed the prescribed ablution before prayer touches a woman until after he has completed his devotions he must perform the ablution again; whereas one of the Hanifi school may touch a woman with impunity, but would incur a similar penalty if, after the ablution, he even smiled before completing the ceremony of prayer.

Although Chale approached Islam with a detached mind free from ingrained dogma, he had learned that these differences of ritual had had no effect on the unity of Islam in the past, but now new interpretations, the creation of modern minds whose aim was to twist Islamic teaching to fit their own ends, were continually making

their appearance and spreading from India in ever-widening circles throughout the Islamic world, confusing the belief of Muslims who had hitherto taken the unity of Islam for granted. The group of the Ahmedis was but one example of the schism and sectarianism which threatened to divide the followers of Mohammed into separate camps, when they might so easily form one vast band of believers.

Then there was another aspect. So far as he could understand, the Arabs in Mecca did not realize the extent of their power. Muslims throughout the world looked towards Mecca for guidance, but received little. Yet a religious and political propaganda organization in Mecca might exert immense influence for good. A broadcasting station which issued authoritative statements from the fountainhead of Islam would give comfort, guidance, and happiness to millions. He knew that such ideas might shock many of his conservative Malay friends, but he was convinced that he was right. Muslims of every race were becoming more progressive, but not always in the best way.

As he saw it, the basic teaching of Islam was really the moderate democratic imperialism so revered by the British people. That was why Muslims had a greater regard for Great Britain and its system than for any other power, and why the King of England had over one hundred million loyal Muslim subjects. He was convinced that there existed in the world no two greater or more powerful forces for good than Islam and British imperial democracy. A combination of two institutions with such similar aims would form an irresistible barrier to the ever-present forces of disorder and war.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Chale felt that he wanted to show Muslims how to use the results of modern science and invention for their own good, how to choose the gold of Western civilization and discard the dross. Above all countries Arabia needed to move forward and to keep pace with the conditions of the Muslims who were living under the guidance of European peoples. Progressive Muslims who went on the pilgrimage accepted Arabia's primitive conditions as a matter of course and thanked God that they were able to enter the Holy Land. Thus Islam still had paramount power over people of all races who went to Arabia. Even so, he knew that what he saw happening among the Malays must be happening all over the Muslim world. Islam might not be losing its hold on its people to the extent that the Christian churches were losing theirs, but the danger was there. Yet it would not be beyond the power of a man to arrest the decay that had set in, to recover that influence which had been lost and to extend it: not by breaking down traditions, but by preserving the identity of Islam and at the same time stimulating its capacity for progress.

Chale had read much of King Ibn Saud and recognized him for an enlightened man. He and his fierce Wahabbis had already swept away many encrustations that had gathered like barnacles upon the ancient faith, and they had purged Arabia of bandits and robbers so that every believer might make the pilgrimage in peace and without fear of being robbed or killed. But there was much more to be done, and Chale felt that if he could but win Ibn Saud's trust he might convince the rulers of Arabia that some departure from the strict conservatism of the past would not be against the future interests of Islam.

That was the dream which took him on his return to

Sarawak: to breathe new life into Islam, to restore the ancient faith to its pristine simplicity and to unite its sects into a single body that would be a great power for peace in the modern world. That such union would be a power for peace and not for evil, he was assured. The very word Islam meant peace, and he swore to himself that the way to peace lay not in leagues and diplomatic pacts but in that sacred haven of rest, Holy Mecca, the very heart of the Muslim world, the star towards which millions of believers turned their eyes and prostrated their bodies in supplication five times every day.

To some, to most indeed, it might have seemed a fantastic scheme for one man to attempt. He knew perfectly well that if he were so much as to suggest the idea to any European in Kuching he would become the laughing-stock of the Club in half an hour. That did not deter him. Once his vision had clarified the whole of his driving energy crystallized out in that set resolve. He did not under-estimate the difficulties which lay before him, but not for one moment did he let them daunt him. He knew that it might take years, perhaps a lifetime, to accomplish what he had in mind, but he was now well schooled in patience and he had no intention of ruining everything by trying to move too fast. He recognized that he had still much to learn, and that he could do nothing until he had proved himself by making the pilgrimage. To obtain the knowledge and experience he needed he was ready to face the obloquy of his fellow-countrymen and to undergo the trials which he knew would confront him on the way, for he was one of those rare creatures who, when they have found themselves, are capable of a single selfless purpose.

He had not been back in Kuching long before he

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

decided that it would be prudent to make his public declaration of faith in Singapore rather than in Sarawak. He himself cared not a rap for the ridicule with which he knew the Europeans would greet his conversion. But he had little doubt that they would say he had become a Muslim as a stunt, and he feared the effect this might have upon the minds of the Malays. Besides that he was afraid that the officials might think he was trying to obtain some political control over the Malays, and that might easily create difficulties which he could avoid by taking the final step in Singapore.

He was in no mind to add to the obstacles he already saw before him. His inquiries had shown him that the mere formal declaration of faith would not act as a passport to Mecca. He had learnt that the Arabs, always prejudiced against European Muslims, had of late become intensely suspicious of them, and he realized that before he could hope to set foot in Mecca he must win their confidence. He had been studying Arabic hard, but he doubted if that would be enough, and he had no wish to sail under false colours. He sought counsel of his old friend Mohammed Ali.

The old man pondered for a while. Then he said :

“ If one goes into the forest it is well to carry a staff.”

Chale knew enough of Malay idiom not to misunderstand him.

“ Mohammed Ali means that I should take a woman with me? ” he asked.

“ Tuan. A woman of Islam.”

The idea was a new one to Chale, but he saw its possibilities at once. It was the right of every true Muslim to make the pilgrimage : only those whose good faith was

suspect encountered difficulties. A Muslim woman could go to Mecca without hindrance if she were accompanied by her husband, and it was natural for a man to take his wife if he could afford it. Chale saw that the very fact that he was taking a woman on the Haj would increase his prospects of getting through. He realized that he would have to marry her according to the Muslim rites, and it was characteristic of his determination that when he saw that such a marriage would further his chances he did not hesitate to accept Mohammed Ali's suggestion. The only point he had to decide was whom he should take. For a Malay, in such circumstances, any woman would have done. But although Chale had come to adopt Eastern ideas intellectually, emotionally he was still a European: which meant that he preferred to take a woman he liked. And as he thought over Mohammed Ali's proposal it seemed to him that fate had thrown such a woman in his path.

This girl, Munirah, a Sarawak Malay, had an unhappy history: how unhappy Chale had learned only on his return to Kuching. He had first known her when, as Private Secretary, he had been placed in charge of the Rajah's rubber garden. As he made his round of the trees in the early mornings he would see her weeding alongside her father, Abu Bakar. She was but a child, no more than fourteen, but even then her loveliness had attracted him: her great brown eyes, her fair skin, her beautifully shaped mouth. He took to passing the time of day with her, conquering her shyness by teasing her a little. He gave her trifling presents, pleased to see her smile.

Then she vanished from the garden. He made inquiries. Abu Bakar told him that she was to be married. It gave

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Chale a pang to think of her going to a man so young, although he knew it was the customary age. Later he heard rumours that the marriage had not turned out happily, but not until he returned to Sarawak did he hear the whole story, which I had from Munirah's lips.

Among the Malays marriages are always arranged by the parents, as they still are in many Continental countries. As a rule the system works well enough, and, contrary to the popular European belief, Muslim women are far from being down-trodden chattels without rights or freedom. At a time when the Western world, after a prolonged wrangle as to whether women were human beings at all, had declared that although above the beasts they were to be considered far inferior to men, the Koran had described them as "the twin-halves of man," and had given them the right to inherit and to own property. There was no question but that they possessed souls, and Islam promised that they would enjoy the future life equally with men. In Islam motherhood is regarded with reverence and homage. Mohammed taught that "Paradise lies at the foot of the Mother."

"The world and all things in it are precious," said the Prophet, "but the most precious thing in the world is a virtuous woman."

The Sarawak Malays, in common with other Muslims, take pains to keep their women virtuous. A Malay girl is very strictly brought up, and is hedged round by more conventions than any Victorian maiden ever was. Unlike the girls of the pagan tribes of Borneo, who may take as many lovers as they choose before marriage, the Malay girl is so carefully watched that she rarely has the opportunity to be anything but chaste.

MUNIRAH

Once married, her influence in the home is paramount. "Woman is a queen in her own house," said the Prophet, and this is literally true. Actually, her influence extends beyond the home, for not only in Sarawak but throughout the Muslim world women often control affairs from behind the scenes. As a rule Malay women are good housewives, cheerful and intelligent, with a strong sense of humour which makes them excellent company. They have not the same liberty of action as European women, but they recognize that the Prophet enjoined their seclusion to protect them from insults and indignities (Oriental men in general, and Arabs in particular, being highly sexed), and so far from disliking this restraint the majority prefer it. They have no wish to be forced out into public life. Apart from the dangers to themselves, the enforced seclusion gives them more power over their men-folk, who thus cannot easily come under the sway of other women: and power is what women want, the world over.

The Prophet ordained that Muslim men should be allowed polygamy for good reasons. Christian teaching generally suggests that his decision was due to a realization that he must pander to the lust of his followers, whereas his real intention was to protect women from neglect or desertion. When a Muslim man takes another wife it is usually at the senior wife's suggestion, because, knowing that she is growing older and has borne several children, she feels that she can no longer satisfy her husband's sexual needs. Sooner than watch him having promiscuous affairs with other women, she elects to stimulate her own interest by choosing for him another wife. Slyness and promiscuity are thereby avoided, and every wife,

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

provided she is chaste, can depend upon security during her lifetime.

Although the Prophet allowed four wives, he did so only to provide for certain contingencies. One wife might become insane, another might be a nagger, a third might contract an incurable disease. Realizing the frailty of human nature, Mohammed's aim was to protect every wife from being abandoned or turned out of her home by enjoining that her husband should keep her in his household, provide for her, and take another wife. Four wives are very unusual, and the Turkish seraglio was not Mohammed's intention but an abuse born of the prosperity of the Ottoman Empire. Usually Muslims, particularly when young, have only one wife, and seldom more than two. The old wife runs the house, and the young wife is subservient to her. The husband, when taking a new wife, promises the old one that she shall have all she wants, but makes her promise not to quarrel, on pain of his leaving her, so that even if she has her grievances she keeps the peace.

The Koran does not permit Muslims to have two wives unless they can afford to support them, and this law is not abused. Arabs usually have both wives living in the same house, but Malays, since their womenfolk are apt to be quarrelsome, order life differently, and each wife occupies a separate house.

Every Muslim husband discusses his personal affairs with his wife. She, with few distractions of her own, is able to view his problems in perspective and thus can give him sound advice, on which he usually acts. Like the priestesses who controlled the Delphic oracle, she lives remote from the world but is extremely well-informed. Liberty of

MUNIRAH

thought has never been denied her, and she finds her means of self-expression by swaying her husband's mind.

Munirah's mother, Siti Fatimah, was undoubtedly the controlling influence in her husband's household. It was she who had arranged for Munirah to marry Abang Gani. The betrothal had been made years before Chale had ever seen the girl, when she was only ten years old. There had been nothing unusual in that. But Abang Gani, who was a widower, had been an oldish man even then. Siti Fatimah had taken no account of that. She wanted to see her daughter marry well, and when Abang Gani made the customary advances through the agency of an elderly intermediary she was delighted, for she knew him to be a man of substance who would be able to put down a handsome bride-gift. Abu Bakar had fallen in with her ideas (such was his habit), and after the preliminary bargaining, conducted with relish by both sides, the negotiations for the marriage were brought to a conclusion that was highly satisfactory to every one concerned but the prospective bride.

She, poor child, had no say in the matter at all. Had she been a boy she would have had a certain latitude of choice. Malay parents like to arrange for their sons to be married about the age of fifteen. It is usual for the mother to set off on a round of ceremonial calls on her neighbours who have marriageable daughters. Having inspected these young women, she describes their attractions to her son, laying stress upon the colour of their skins, the length of their eyelashes, their height, figures, and character, and from these descriptions (coloured, no doubt, by maternal preference) he must choose his future wife. The parents on

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

both sides then start negotiations, through intermediaries, for the sum that is to be paid as the bride-gift for the girl.

But little Munirah, so far from having even a restricted choice, as her brother would have had, did not even know of the projected marriage until her companions in the village began to laugh at her because she was betrothed to a man old enough to be her grandfather. When she learned what was in store for her she protested vigorously, but in vain. Her mother, complacent at the thought of the sum Abang Gani had been screwed up to pay, was in no mood to be made the laughing-stock of her neighbours by what she considered her daughter's whim; and all Munirah's father would say was that she must be guided by custom and her mother's will.

At that time Munirah had not learned to submit herself either to the will of her mother or of God. The thought of her marriage was repugnant. Abang Gani's name became a synonym for horror. She was terrified at the thought of even seeing him.

One day when she was alone in the house she saw him approaching. At the time she did not know it, but he was following custom by coming to do some minor house repairs for his prospective parents-in-law. Panic seized her. She leapt from the window and ran off into the jungle, where she lay hidden all day. But when the shadows began to lengthen she could bear the loneliness no longer, and ventured out. Even then she could not bring herself to go home, lest Abang Gani should still be there, but made her way stealthily to the house of her aunt, who chided her for her folly.

"Cheh, silly one!" she said. "You might have broken

MUNIRAH

your leg, jumping from that window. And who would want to marry a cripple girl?"

"Better be a cripple than the wife of an aged monkey," retorted Munirah rebelliously.

"One dollar is the same as a hundred cents," replied her aunt sententiously, "and one man is much like another. It is not fitting to repay with poison him who offers you milk."

Munirah returned home next day, and there followed a prolonged conflict between her own feelings and the restraining influences of her religion and her duty to her parents. It would be idle to pretend that submission won. Even at that age Munirah, like Chale, was a rebel. It may have been the indomitable spirit in both which attracted them in later years. For the little girl never weakened in her refusal to accept the situation her mother had thrust upon her and she declined to see Abang Gani. Finally Siti Fatimah appeared to relent. No more was said of Abang Gani. Munirah thought she was free of him.

She told me that had she known what was in her mother's mind she would have appealed to Chale. He had won her childish heart, and to her a white man was the embodiment of power. But Siti Fatimah, seeing that her daughter was likely to remain recalcitrant, came to the astute conclusion that guile would serve better than compulsion. She was not an unkind mother. I have no doubt that she thought she was doing what was best for her daughter in the long run. She knew young girls had silly fancies and she did not wish Munirah to make a fool of herself. Moreover—and this was probably her most cogent consideration—the marriage had been arranged, and, since it was a good marriage from the point of view

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

of local opinion, she could not back out of it without loss of social standing.

So she told Munirah that she was to have a holiday from work. They were all going to Balingian, a village two days' journey up the coast, where a relative was to be married. Munirah was delighted that she was to be one of the wedding party. She had forgotten that Abang Gani was a distant relative and that he lived at Balingian. Even if she had remembered it would not have occurred to her that her own parents would play her such a trick.

But when they arrived at Balingian and she found herself installed in the house of Abang Gani her suspicions were aroused. She taxed her mother. Siti Fatimah tried to pass it off lightly.

"Did I not tell you that you were to attend a wedding party?" said she. "And at a wedding what could a girl wish better than to be the bride?"

Munirah was aghast. She looked round the house in terror. Great preparations had been made, and now she realized that they were all for her. Beneath the house new posts had been driven in, to give extra support to the floor owing to the number of guests expected. Brass and gongs, the family heirlooms, were ranged round the walls. New mats were upon the floors. In the kitchen women were busy cooking. Munirah saw a great bed with a pink mosquito-curtain and many pillows, bridal pillows with pink ends and gold lace flounces: they too were for her. Once more panic seized her. But this time escape was impossible. Her emotion gave her courage to speak to her mother as she had never dared speak before. Siti Fatimah paid no heed, but thrust her into the kitchen, where the women giggled at her discomfiture. Abang Gani's aged

mother brought her some rice to eat. She flung it upon the floor, screaming that she did not want to marry an old man.

Siti Fatimah returned, much perturbed at such an appalling breach of good manners by her own daughter.

"Cheh!" she cried. "You little slut, you will expose us to such ridicule that even the monkeys in the jungle will laugh at us. Will you make both my cheeks black? Let there be no more of this nonsense, or I will beat you until you are half dead."

"But he is too old, he is too old," sobbed Munirah. "He was born when the pirates yet made raids upon our homes."

"Then marry him for a week," said Siti Fatimah practically, "and see how you like him. Once the ceremony has been performed and all know that I have been able to protect your chastity so that you go virgin to your husband, our family honour will be satisfied. Then you can divorce him if you will."

I am quite sure that the old lady had no intention of allowing the marriage to be broken up; apart from anything else it would have meant repaying the bride-gift, and this she had already spent on Munirah's trousseau, which included the pink mosquito-curtain and the pillows upon the bed. But her immediate purpose was to see the marriage take place, lest she should be shamed before her friends and neighbours. That thought was intolerable to her, and she was prepared to promise anything to get her way.

And in the end, of course, she got it. Even Munirah's defiance weakened before her mother's appeal not to hold her up to public shame: the greatest humiliation a Malay

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

can suffer. So she allowed herself to be dressed, and the ceremony was performed, Munirah sitting with downcast eyes, loaded with gold and jewels (mostly borrowed from relatives for the occasion), while the principal guest sprinkled rice steeped in saffron over her head.

Later, attended by her five bridesmaids, she crept unwillingly into the huge bed, trembling with apprehension. Her one thought was to avoid any contact with her husband, and to protect herself she had taken the precaution of putting on seven pairs of drawers, which she had borrowed from her friends.

At midnight the bridesmaids slipped out of bed and stole away. Munirah had known they would. They were but playing their parts according to custom, and it would have been useless to implore them to stay.

She waited, listening, alert, her heart thumping with fear. She heard a faint stirring, then a creaking of the bamboo floor. It was Abang Gani, coming to claim her. In an instant she was out of the bed, and ran terrified to the part of the house where the members of her family were sleeping on mattresses placed under one vast mosquito-net. She pulled the net open and crept inside, hoping that she would not disturb her mother. But her grandfather started up, peered about, and saw her by the light of the moon which had emerged from behind a flying cloud. He grumbled at her and woke her mother, who began to beat her, and then dragged her back to her husband's bed, on the edge of which she sat till dawn by the opening of the pink net, shivering with fear.

After a Malay wedding the bride and bridegroom are sometimes left alone in the house for three days. Food is provided for them, and although their relatives and friends

MUNIRAH

may visit them on the third day, they themselves may not leave the house until the seventh. Even then they may not go down to the sea or into the jungle for forty days.

Accordingly, on the morning after Munirah's wedding every one cleared out of the house, leaving Abang Gani to cope with his rebellious bride as best he might.

The wretched man did his best to win her. At first he tried coaxing, but she would not look at him. He cooked her a little sweet rice. She refused to touch it. Whenever he tried to get near her she bolted to the other end of the house. Once he caught her and tore some of her clothes off, but she scratched him and wrenched herself free. By this time she not only hated him, but was tormented by the very idea of sex.

Yet she dared not run from the house. Among the Malays superstition dies hard despite the teachings of Islam, and she had heard of a girl who left the wedding house in all her bridal finery and was never seen again. People said she had been devoured by evil spirits. Munirah felt that it would be better to be raped by Abang Gani than to suffer such a fate as that.

When Siti Fatimah and the rest of the family party returned on the third day Munirah was still a virgin. Then Abang Gani (counselled no doubt by his experienced mother-in-law) tried more subtle means of persuasion. Munirah had to eat, but he kept control of the food. He would ask her what she would like, and when she expressed a wish for some delicacy such as sour mango, or one of the tiny golden bananas known as pisang mas, he would hold it out, ask her to give in, and when she refused eat it before her eyes. He even denied her water. . . . And so at last her resistance was worn down. And when Abang

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Gani duly produced the white handkerchief his mother-in-law had given him on the wedding day and displayed the evidence of her daughter's virginity, each had cause for satisfaction: Siti Fatimah, because the bloodstains justified the bride-gift she had demanded; Abang Gani, because they proved to all that he had not been fooled into marrying a girl who had lost her maidenhead to another man.

Now Munirah's case, although an extreme one, was not abnormal. Malay girls of good family are married so young, and are so inexperienced, that it is often weeks before their husbands can possess them. The men accept the situation; they may indeed find it physically stimulating. At all events, they rate virginity so highly that they tolerate the hysterical disinclination of their brides to emerge from their maiden state. How lasting is the effect of the emotional conflict and distress upon the girls' minds it is difficult to know; but the fact remains they usually settle down to normal sexual life.

With Munirah it was otherwise. Physical union with her husband did not cause her to like him better. If anything she detested him the more. He on his part became exasperated, was cruel to her, denied her everything she wanted. She was too young to secure the control which the Malay woman so often has over her husband. She tried to find some friend who would help her, but there was no one. Abang Gani was a man of some position, and no one cared to cross him. Besides, she was his wife, and there it was. If she did not get on with him that was the will of God.

Finally she contrived to get a friend to write a letter for her to her mother, who had returned to Kuching

MUNIRAH

immediately after the wedding. She said she was being treated like a slave, and vowed she would never forgive her mother if she did not come and take her away: she must come by the tide after that which brought the letter.

The letter was smuggled out of the house and sent down the coast by a sago schooner to Kuching. When Siti Fatimah received it she was seriously perturbed. No doubt she was irritated by what she considered her daughter's perversity, but the letter was couched in such terms that her superstitious mind dared not disregard it for fear of supernatural vengeance overtaking her.

So up she went to Balingian. Munirah reminded her of her promise that she should divorce Abang Gani after the wedding. But Siti Fatimah was in no mind to have a daughter who was no longer a virgin on her hands again. The girl's value in the marriage market would be seriously reduced, and before she could be remarried the bride-gift would have to be repaid. Also, to be fair, it is probable that Siti Fatimah thought that things might change for the better. So she countered Munirah's appeal by a suggestion that her father should petition the Rajah to give Abang Gani a Government post in Kuching. Then Munirah would be near her family and her friends, and that would make for her happiness.

With that Munirah had to be content. The post for Abang Gani was secured, and they came to live in Kuching.

For a time Munirah was happier. But she could not overcome her detestation of her husband, and he did not treat her any better. For consolation she turned to Islam and learned, as every Muslim learns sooner or later, to submit to the trials it pleased God to send her, hoping that the

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

day might come when it would be his will that she should go on the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Such was the state of affairs when Chale returned to Sarawak. By that time he had forgotten all about her, but a chance mention of her name recalled vividly to his mind the lovely child who had worked in the Rajah's rubber garden. A few inquiries revealed the story of her unhappy marriage, and as his informant bore Abang Gani no goodwill the account of the treatment she received was not understated. Chale was touched, and sorry, though his mind was too full of his own schemes to give the matter more than a passing thought.

But when he had decided that Mohammed Ali's advice to take a woman to Mecca was sound he remembered what he had heard of Munirah. At once the affair took on a different aspect. He had to find a woman. Why shouldn't he take her? He had been charmed with her when she was a child. There was no reason why he should not like her now. He detested cruelty, and if half he had heard were true she was being abominably treated. Here was a chance to help her and to provide himself with a woman to take with him on the Haj.

The fact that she was married did not greatly disturb him. Under the law of Islam divorce is not difficult, so long as money is forthcoming to pay the fine. He determined to explore the possibilities.

Chapter IV

THE SHEIKH SYSTEM

CHALE was far too subtle to risk provoking a scandal by arranging a clandestine meeting with Munirah. He had no difficulty in getting to know her husband. They became so friendly that Chale offered to give him lessons in writing romanized Malay. Abang Gani was pleased and flattered. He would have been suspicious of another Malay, but apparently he had no such feelings about Chale, and he suggested that the lessons should take place at his own house, which was exactly what Chale wanted. To Abang Gani it was unthinkable that a Muslim woman would dare to have any kind of affair with an infidel, while Chale, whose thoughts were not bent on dalliance, was seldom troubled by scruples when something he wanted was at stake.

As usual, he was careful not to rush matters. He went to the house, gave Abang Gani his lessons, and after two or three visits was introduced to Munirah, who, he found, had grown into a very lovely woman. She had both dignity and intelligence, and it did not take him long to decide that he would find no one better suited to his purpose.

Having made some discreet inquiries, he took to arriving at the house before Abang Gani returned from work. It was natural for Munirah to ask him to wait and to offer him a cup of coffee. Little by little he got her story. He discovered that so far from being resigned to her

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

married life she was still intensely unhappy. Abang Gani had taken to knocking her about again, and it was obvious that she detested him more than ever. But what could she do?

"There is nothing blacker than black, Tuan," she told him miserably. "And my lot cannot be unhappier than it is."

Chale's quixotic heart was wrung. He lost any compunction he might have had at the thought of taking her away from her husband. The chap was a brute and would deserve all he got. He was desperately sorry for her. As an Arab might have put it rather crudely, she was like a paradise in which a hog fed.

But he saw that it would be no good sympathizing with her too much. To his mind, what she needed was gingering up a bit, so that she would make an effort to escape.

"The cat which is always mewing catches nothing," he suggested.

"Cheh, am I a cloth to be spread before all comers?" she cried indignantly. "I tell my secrets only to you, Tuan."

"Have you no friends to help you?"

"She who depends on her neighbours goes supperless to bed," she told him. "And in a storm God takes a ship where he lists, let the helmsman rend his clothes as he will."

"Yet the boat will have no way if the crew do not hoist the sail," he replied, doing his best to suggest that heaven helps those who help themselves.

"It seems that I am a ship without a sail and without a rudder," she answered. "And if I had either there is no port to which I could sail."



MUNIRAH

THE SHEIKH SYSTEM

That gave Chale the opening he had been waiting for, and he began to show her that there was a way out if she cared to take it. He told her of his intention of becoming a Muslim and going to Mecca. Would she come with him? He was careful to explain that it would be a matter of convenience to them both. She needed an excuse to escape. He needed a woman to take with him. He made her understand that he wanted her company, not her body. Attractive though she was, he knew that there could be no lovemaking while they were on the Haj. But he promised that he would marry her as soon as they reached Singapore: he now had an additional reason to become converted there, since he knew that if he became a Muslim in Sarawak the Europeans would say that he was only doing so in order to get hold of a Malay girl.

She objected that if she divorced her husband she would have to pay a fine and repay the bride-gift. Had it been otherwise, she would have got divorced long ago. He promised her that he would see to that. Then there would be the sin, she said: the sin of going to Singapore with a man who was not a Muslim and to whom she was not married. To that he answered that she should go chaperoned by Mohammed Ali and his wife; moreover, if she committed any sin in leaving her husband would she not be forgiven when she reached the holy Plain of Arafat?

That argument impressed her, as he had known it would. But she would not give him a promise even then.

“The fool has an answer on the edge of her tongue,” she said, “but the wise woman answers after the sun has set and risen.”

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Having planted the idea in her mind Chale was prepared to give it time to take root.

"To-morrow, then," he said.

"Insh-a-Allah!" she replied. "If God pleases."

Then they heard Abang Gani coming up the steps of the house for his writing lesson.

That night Munirah spent many sleepless hours trying to come to a decision.

"How could I know whether to trust his mouth or not?" she asked me, sitting beside the fire in Chale's flat. "How could I tell whether I should not be rising from the dust to sit down in the ashes? How could I be sure that he would indeed marry me when we got to Singapore? How could I tell if he would ever get to Mecca?" She looked at Chale and made a gesture with her graceful hands. "How could I know that he would not become tired of me and throw me away, as I had heard white men do?"

Yet she wanted to trust him. Her desire to go with him was very great. Not only to escape from her husband, although that was much. But there was a far more urgent reason. Ever since she had turned to Islam for consolation in her unhappiness she had longed to go to Mecca. Every year she had watched the pilgrims embarking at Kuching, and had wept because she could not go with them. Chale was holding out the one great chance of her life. It might never come again. She knew that even if she had the money she could not perform the pilgrimage by herself. No Malay woman could fend for herself alone in the ship, and if she were to arrive in Jeddah unprotected the Arabs would swoop down upon her like falcons. Yet she knew that if Chale betrayed her trust she would be worse off than before.

THE SHEIKH SYSTEM

But finally she made her decision, although it cost her all her courage. She felt she could trust him. She would trust him. It would not be difficult to arrange the divorce.

"I will go with you, Tuan," she said, when he came next day. "I have been as a box in search of its lid. Take me by the hand to-day and I will take you by the foot to-morrow."

Chale was touched by that promise of loyalty: although he did not know then how firm that loyalty was to be and how greatly it was to sustain him in the days to come.

Once Munirah had made her decision she wasted no time in gaining her freedom. She decided that rather than divorce her husband, which would bring a certain amount of shame upon her, she would make him take the initiative, and so save Chale paying the fine exacted by the Sarawak Government. She told me, with disarming frankness, that she deliberately set herself to irritate her husband so that she became (as she put it) "like a grain of rice that he could not dislodge from his back teeth." I have no doubt that, like most attractive women, Munirah could be absolutely maddening if she chose, and she drove her husband into such a state of exasperation that he vowed that he could stand her no longer and in a fit of rage cried "Aku jatoh telak," thereby signifying that he would divorce her.

The Koran permits divorce at will, for both husband or wife, and before Abang Gani could change his mind Munirah hastened with her mother to the court of Muslim affairs to apply for a decree. The Datu Hakim gave her the customary injunction to think the matter over for fourteen days. She succeeded in keeping her husband infuriated for the next fortnight, and on the understanding that she

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

should not publish the fact that he had beaten her, he agreed to facilitate the passage of the decree. She then returned to the court, and Abang Gani formally uttered the pronouncement of his wish before the Datu Hakim, because it is not lawful for a woman to make that final statement.

"My destiny with this man is finished," she told the Datu in reply to his inquiry as to whether she would not change her mind, and paid over the amount of the bride-gift, which Abang Gani recovered. She lived in her mother's house for the regulation period of a hundred days before the decree could become absolute: a period which is enforced in order that there may be no doubt as to the parentage of any child which may subsequently be born. During that time she never saw Chale, and had to behave with the utmost circumspection, since any suspicion of misconduct would have entailed a heavy fine.

During this period Chale was busy making his final preparations and studying the conditions of the Malays. The more he saw the more glad did he feel that he had decided to take Munirah with him. Economic conditions had reduced the annual number of pilgrims, particularly women pilgrims, and this was having a deteriorating effect. The Malay girls, at one time so strictly brought up, were growing looser in their morals; they were going to Europeans in greater numbers than before, and times were so hard that their parents were winking at this breach of custom. Chale felt convinced that by going on the pilgrimage Munirah would set an example which would turn the Malay women's thoughts back to the spiritual values of Islam.

That was not to say that there were not devout Muslims

THE SHEIKH SYSTEM

left, particularly in the villages which lay some distance from the capital. The time of the Haj was approaching, and as Chale travelled about the countryside he found men and women making ready to go on the great journey for which they had been skimping and saving for years.

In the Hedjaz there is no law to prevent any person who is a Muslim from birth entering the country. The law of the land is that of the Koran, which governs the civil order as well as providing for the spiritual welfare of the people, and the Koran allows any true Muslim to make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

But the Hedjaz is a poor country. There is no place in the world where a man would be more unhappily placed if stranded without means. The Governments in British Malaya have therefore made a merciful regulation which provides that no pilgrim may leave for Mecca unless he can produce evidence that he possesses a minimum sum of seventy pounds sterling before buying his return ticket from Singapore to Jeddah. The purchase of single tickets is not allowed.

Every Malay who contemplates performing the Haj will take with him his wife and family if he can. But for most the expense of the journey makes that impossible. Usually rigid economy has to be exercised over a protracted period to enable even the head of the family to go, and every member of it joins in the sacrifices involved. They bear discomfort and privation with fortitude and in the spirit born of their faith, for no hardship is too great to suffer when the goal of Mecca is in view. Even friends and neighbours contribute small sums of sedekah, casual alms, to the intending pilgrims.

During this preparatory period the pilgrim is careful

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

to observe the rules and fasts which the Koran enjoins. He prays regularly five times a day, at dawn (suboh), noon (lohor), three o'clock (asr), sundown (meghrib), and at half-past seven (isha). If he be very devout he rises at midnight to say the tahajjud, the recitation of which prayer, although short, is deemed of greater spiritual value than all the rest together.

Besides this he seeks religious instruction every evening from one of the village pundits, who instructs him in the difficult art of chanting the Koran, teaches him the many extra prayers that must be learned and enlightens him as to the rites which he will have to perform when he reaches the Hedjaz.

When the date of his departure draws near it is customary for him to obtain an introduction to one of the agents of the sheikhs of Mecca. Few of these sheikhs are Arabs of pure descent since the original Arab merchants and missionaries who went abroad to preach the religion of Islam intermarried with the women of the countries in which they settled. When they had sufficiently established themselves as traders and their work of conversion had progressed, many of them returned to Mecca with their wives and families and a band of converts, while others remained behind to continue the teaching and to arrange for the despatch of pilgrims. In this way what is known as the sheikh system came into being.

This system, which has been in force for centuries, grants the sheikhs of Mecca the control of the annual pilgrimage. Only a descendant of one of the original Meccans may set up in business as a sheikh. On the other hand, any Muslim who marries a sheikh's daughter becomes himself a sheikh on his father-in-law's death. It is

THE SHEIKH SYSTEM

not unusual for a pure Malay to become a sheikh in this manner, when he has excellent opportunities to establish a large pilgrim connexion with his own people.

The privileges granted by the system are strictly guarded, for the sheikhs depend for their livelihood upon the pilgrims. Economically, the Hedjaz is the poorest country in the world. If it were not for the Haj it could not provide even a fraction of its people with the bare necessities of life. In one way or another almost the whole population gets its living from the pilgrims, but the sheikhs obtain the cream of the profits and are naturally loath to lose them. It is customary for them to refer to the pilgrims as their crops.

"God, in his compassion and mercy, has provided us with these crops," they will say. "Therefore it behoves us to reap our harvest."

For the purpose of dealing with the pilgrimage the sheikhs of Mecca have divided themselves into groups which correspond with the principal regions of the Muslim world: the Arabian peninsula, Egypt, Turkey, Persia, Morocco, Arabian Africa and Black Africa, Turkestan and Afghanistan, India, and the East Indies. Custom requires a pilgrim from, say, the East Indies to name a sheikh of the East Indian group when he reaches Jeddah, the port from which the Haj begins. He may not name a sheikh of any other group, even if he happens to be on friendly terms with one, and no sheikh may attempt to recruit pilgrims from any region but his own.

In Mecca there are over five hundred sheikhs in the East Indian group alone, so that competition to secure juma'ah, as their clients are called, is intense. The system is thus the cause of much jealousy and rivalry, and no sheikh has a

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

good word to say about another in the same group as himself.

The sheikhs of each group appoint their agents in Medina and Jeddah and in the principal cities of their particular regions. The East Indian group has its agents in Singapore, Penang, Batavia, Sourabaia and other important centres in Malaya and the Archipelago. Such agents do not necessarily represent one sheikh exclusively, and some of them may have the business of a score. They receive a commission on each pilgrim they secure, and they in their turn send out sub-agents to the villages and smaller towns to give religious instruction, to keep the necessity of performing the Haj in the minds of Muslims, and to seek recruits for their masters.

These sub-agents receive little if any pay, but live for the most part on the bounty of the villagers and by the sale of charms and medicines. Malays will pay as much as ten or fifteen dollars for a charm in whose efficacy they believe. Usually it is nothing more than a piece of paper on which is written a quotation from the Koran, sewn up in cloth to form a tiny bundle, so that it may be worn round the neck. Some are for keeping evil spirits away, some for preventing sickness, while others are designed to make a loved one attracted to the wearer. Healing charms are prepared by writing a text from the Koran on a scrap of paper, burning it, mixing the ashes with water, and reciting some prayers. The mixture is then given to the sick person to drink, and, since faith is the greatest of healers, an astonishing number of cures are effected in this manner.

Naturally, therefore, the prices paid for these charms vary in accordance with the status and power of the per-

THE SHEIKH SYSTEM

sons who prepare them. A Said, or descendant of the Prophet through Hussein, one of the sons of Khalifa Ali by his marriage with Mohammed's daughter Fatimah, is believed to possess peculiar merit and power, and a charm prepared by one will always fetch a high price. Unfortunately for the Malays, who are simple folk, not every wandering agent who calls himself a Said is a descendant of the Prophet, and many an unscrupulous Arab has adopted the title for the purpose of taking advantage of their credulity and securing a higher price for his charms and medicines than he could otherwise have asked; but even those who are not charlatans often amass sufficient capital to set up in business as agents themselves.

It is from one of these travelling wakil that the Malay who intends to make the Haj must obtain his introduction to an agent in Singapore. There the agent will meet his ship, and will take him to one of the pilgrim houses in Kampong Jawa, on the outskirts of the city. The agent then takes charge of his money (if he can get it), helps him to obtain the special passport for the pilgrimage, buys his return ticket to Jeddah (he is also an agent for the steamship lines), pays for his accommodation and food, and for a modest consideration performs every conceivable service for him until he embarks in the pilgrim ship for Jeddah, where he will be met by another agent of the sheikh he has chosen to name. Indeed, from the moment of his arrival in Singapore until his return from the pilgrimage he is no longer an individual but a cipher.

Chale had learnt much about the sheikh system from those who had made the pilgrimage. He admired the elaborate organization which on the whole seemed to work well, particularly for people with so little knowledge of the

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

outside world as the unsophisticated Malays of Sarawak, since it ensured their personal safety, prevented their being robbed, and guaranteed their whereabouts being known. The weak spots in the system seemed to lie in the fact that the sheikhs were responsible only for the safety of their wards, and not for their comfort. So that a bad sheikh had it in his power to make the life of a pilgrim in Mecca extremely miserable. There was nothing to prevent a pilgrim from changing his sheikh if he wished, but Chale knew the ascendancy of the Arabs to be such that a Malay would seldom dare to do so once he had entered a sheikh's house, and would endure ill-treatment and neglect rather than make a fuss. That such cases did occur he knew; although not often, since the competition for *juma'ah* was so keen that the sheikhs were usually jealous of their reputations and reluctant to get a bad name, which might mean a falling off in pilgrims for future years.

Chale's inquiries showed him that it was this very competition which caused the worst abuse of the system, a recent development which has come to be known as 'the pilgrim sale.' An agent in Singapore or Batavia, having recruited through the medium of his visiting assistants a batch of pilgrims for the ensuing year, will offer them for sale to all the various Meccan sheikhs whom he represents. Each sheikh then tenders for the batch, and he who offers the highest price per head will secure the pilgrims as his *juma'ah*. Some will pay up to two pounds in gold per head in their anxiety not to be left without *juma'ah*, and since they have no intention of losing on the transaction the result is that they reimburse themselves by exacting higher payments from the pilgrims for services rendered.

THE SHEIKH SYSTEM

On the other hand, the sheikhs do not have it all their own way. Even if he buys a batch of pilgrims, no sheikh can feel certain of having secured his rightful juma'ah until they have arrived in Jeddah and definitely named him. This is the invariable custom, and a sheikh has no claim upon a pilgrim until his name has been formally uttered. The agent who has sold the batch naturally does his best to carry out his part of the contract. Before his pilgrims embark he constantly reminds them of their duty to name sheikh so-and-so upon their arrival at Jeddah, and he goes so far as to supply them with cards on which the name of their sheikh is clearly printed, lest they should forget it in the excitement and nervousness of landing on holy soil. But the agent cannot prevent a pilgrim from changing his mind on the voyage, and an unscrupulous sheikh will employ agents to travel in the pilgrim ships for the very purpose of crimping pilgrims who have been sold.

One fine calm day at sea, when every one is at peace and happily occupied with thoughts of his approaching destination, a well-spoken Arab will approach a pilgrim whose bearing suggests that he will be an easy prey and enter into conversation. After some casual talk he will suggest that they take their midday meal together.

"I am going to kill a fowl to-day, brother," he will say. "What better than that you should share it with me?"

"I am like one who falls in the river and finds a fish in his hand," replies the gullible pilgrim, his mouth watering at the thought of a succulent meal, and honoured by the attention of an Arab.

The next stage is easy. When the meal is over, the Arab asks casually :

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

"Who is your sheikh, brother?"

"I mean to name Yakob Patani."

"What? Yakob Patani?" cries his host. "You've been told he is a good man? How could anyone so deceive you? Wallah! Brother, I warn you in good faith, don't make such a mistake as to name him as your sheikh. You will live to regret it. I've spent all my life in Mecca, and I know. He will squeeze you dry. You will be like a field of sugar-cane after an elephant has passed through it. You'll be left with nothing. Without even enough to return to your home."

"Alas, alas, I am like rice coming under the pestle! If a thunderbolt fell from heaven it would surely light upon my neck, so unlucky am I! But it is too late now to change."

"No, brother, no. It is not too late. Once you name Yakob Patani at Jeddah you are finished. But we have not reached Jeddah yet. There is still time for you to change your mind."

"But whom should I name? I am an ignorant man and know no other sheikh."

"Name Ahmed Acheh. Wallah! Every one knows him to be the best and most considerate sheikh in Mecca. You and I are brothers, and after hearing you mention such a name as Yakob Patani, I should be wanting in duty and brotherly affection if I did not warn you of your peril. Brother, that fowl was good. If God pleases, I will kill another to-morrow."

And so the unfortunate pilgrim, his confidence in Yakob Patani shaken, and dreading lest he should fall into the hands of one of the bad sheikhs of whom he has heard so much, accepts the advice of the Arab, who in reality

THE SHEIKH SYSTEM

is no other than Ahmed Acheh's tout. But should he chance to meet his shipboard acquaintance in the streets of Mecca and greet him as a friend, he will find that his one-time brother will pass him by without a sign.

Thus does many a sheikh of Mecca lose his rightful juma'ah at the last moment. He has no redress, and his only safeguard is to arrange for the agent to send a trusty underling to guard his clients from the wiles of these travelling terrors.

Having grasped the intricacies and dangers of the sheikh system, Chale determined to be extremely circumspect before he committed himself to naming anyone. For him the matter was of particular importance, since he realized that on the choice of the right man might depend his ultimate success in reaching Mecca. Therefore he declined to come to any decision while in Sarawak or even to allow himself to be persuaded by one of the travelling wakil to surrender himself to any particular agent upon his arrival at Singapore.

He had many invitations, for by this time his intentions were common knowledge among the Malays. A few he had told openly. They were polite and murmured "Thanks be to God," but he could see that even though they knew him well they received his information with caution. He had always kept his word to them, but it was evident that they would never have full confidence in him until he returned from the Haj.

Their attitude nettled him somewhat, although he knew it was but natural, since it was something beyond their experience for a white man to embrace Islam. He began to wonder if after all he had been wise to keep his intentions dark from the Europeans. Now that he was on the verge

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

of sailing he did not care who knew. In fact he wanted them all to know. He was not ashamed of what he was going to do. On the contrary, he was proud of it. Why should he make his conversion a hole-and-corner affair? Why should he not give them something worth talking about before he left?

So he decided to give a tiffin party at the Rest House. He invited nearly every white man of any importance in Kuching, official and civilian, with the exception of the Rajah, who was on a tour up-country. Every one accepted —about twenty-four in all. He let it be understood that it was a farewell party, as a return for the hospitality he had enjoyed.

Chale is thorough in everything he does, and he is an excellent host. He took infinite trouble over the arrangements. He engaged a special cook. He hired a Chinese boy from the Club to mix the cocktails. He had the table decorated with pink and white Honolulu creeper, and borrowed some extra glass and crockery from the Colonial Secretary.

It was a grand tiffin: crab salad, curry, ice-cream, and plenty of beer. According to local custom, some of the guests made rather fulsome speeches, extolling virtues no one believed him to possess, complimenting him on the work he had done for the country, paying tribute to his knowledge of the native mind, saying how sorry they were to lose him, and hoping it would not be long before they saw him back in their midst again. They went so far as to sing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" (as I have mentioned, it had been a first-class meal), and then some one incautiously called upon him for a speech.

Chale had been sitting there at the head of the table,

THE SHEIKH SYSTEM

chuckling to himself and waiting for that invitation. I can see the gleam in his narrow blue eyes as he rose to his feet and began to speak, his head cocked slightly on one side.

He thanked them all for their kind expression of feeling. It had been delightful being back in the country again. Having had a good deal to do with native affairs it was a particular pleasure for him to be able to say a few words since he knew that every one present had the same high regard for the natives as he had, especially for the Malays ("Hear, hear!"), although many of those whose faces he saw before him understood them far better than he did ("No, no!"). He himself felt that although much was known of the Malays' customs, less attention had been paid to their religion. He would go farther, and say that without a study of their religion no one could understand the Malays at all. He was looking forward to making up for that deficiency in the near future (gasps of astonishment, instantly suppressed).

Then he let them have it.

"Gentlemen," he said, "as you all know, I am leaving the territory by the next boat. But you may not all know my destination. It is . . . Mecca." Dead silence. "I shall be leaving with another pilgrim, whom I intend to marry when I have become converted to Islam in Singapore. With her I mean to perform the pilgrimage to which I have looked forward with anticipation for many years. Once I have earned the title of Haji, I hope to return and greet you all again."

The English are a curious race, quick to take offence at trifles, but not without dignity when the affront is sufficiently deep. For of course there was not a man

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

present but took Chale's declaration as a personal affront. Yet not one of them said a word to his face. There was even a ripple of conventional applause when he sat down, more from habit, perhaps, than anything else, and then twenty-four perfect gentlemen shook him by the hand and thanked him for his hospitality. Not one of them told him that he was lowering the prestige of the white man in the tropics by marrying a Malay. No one said a word about his treachery to his creed, or warned him that he would be losing caste by becoming a Muslim. No one called him a crank, or told him that he was crazy. No one accused him of plotting against the State. They just said good-bye, and trooped off in a body to discuss the matter in the Club. It was a remarkable exposition of self-restraint.

Chapter V

THE CONVERSION OF DAVID CHALE

CHALE and Munirah left Kuching for Singapore two days after the tiffin party. Chale was relieved to find that there were few other Europeans travelling in the ship, but six other pilgrims were going with them, only one of them a woman. This was Alimah, a Sarawak Malay girl who was well known to many of the Europeans in Kuching. She was one of the few Malay prostitutes in the town. Although none of her clients had known it, she had been selling her body for the ultimate benefit of her soul, for, since she was poor and ardently desired to make the Haj, she had not scrupled to obtain the money she required in the only way that seemed possible to her, in defiance of the outraged feelings of her family, but in the comfortable assurance that she would be turning a new page of life when she reached Mecca.

She had confined her favours to Europeans because they could pay best. She had found a ready market, and now that she had accumulated the sum she needed she was performing the pilgrimage, and would return in due course and settle down to an impeccable mode of life, in the manner of a Western lady of easy virtue who, having amassed a modest competence, attains her ambition by retiring to live in a cathedral city. But since she could not go to Mecca alone she had, as Chale intended to do, first made a marriage of convenience, and was taking with her as her husband a Malay who would otherwise

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

have been too poor to make the pilgrimage. If this temporary protector should prove to be unsatisfactory, she would divorce him by mutual agreement on her return; for since no pilgrim allows the idea of sex to enter his thoughts while on the pilgrimage, no complications were likely to ensue.

Besides Alimah and her husband, there were two elderly Malays whom Chale had known as a District Officer, and an old friend of his called Haji Alim, who had been on the pilgrimage before. Chale, like others, had been accustomed to give small sums of 'petra' to Haji Alim every year. Such gifts are regarded as loss in this world for gain in the next. Haji Alim would accept the money and use it for his own purposes. But after death he would not forget. He would be at the gates of the next world ready to welcome the giver. There he would hand back the money, saying, "I greet you. Here is what you entrusted to me. I return it to you for your use as arranged."

Besides his own funds, Haji Alim had in his possession over two thousand dollars, which had been entrusted to him in small sums by devout Muslims who were not yet in a position to go on the Haj, but wished to sacrifice sheep by proxy at Mecca. This sacrifice is known as 'kika,' and forms a kind of insurance for a fitting reception in the next world. Once the sacrifice has been made, the celebrant can, after death, count on his nearest deceased relative telling those in the next world that he is on his way and riding to meet him upon a heavenly steed which, by a process of transmigratory symbolism, takes the place of the sacrificial sheep and will be identified by a peculiar mark, such as a white star on the fore-

THE CONVERSION OF DAVID CHALE

head, which the celebrant has visualized when making arrangements for the ceremony.

On the day the ship sailed all those who had handed Haji Alim kika money for the purchase of sheep came down to the landing-stage to see him off. With them came the relatives and friends of the other pilgrims. But even those who had neither relatives nor friends came to watch the steamer leave, until it seemed that every Muslim in Kuching was there. There was much laughter and a hum of happy and excited conversation; but no weeping or exhibition of emotion. Those who were about to sail had a fixed and glorious purpose. They were bound for a land which all who remained behind hoped that some day they too might reach. The possibility that some might not return seemed to occur to none of them. Or, if it did, it gave no one a moment's uneasiness. What end more blessed could a Muslim hope for than to die in Mecca or to be buried near the Prophet's tomb at Medina?

Chale and Munirah were the centre of interest. Malays he had never set eyes on before came up and shook him by the hand in the Muslim manner—placing both palms upon his right, then drawing them away towards the heart—and wishing peace upon his going. Women crowded round Munirah, begging her to bring them back holy relics from Mecca, if only a few drops of sacred water or a shred of the cloth which covers the House of God, and hugging her and kissing her, until, as she told me, she felt as though she had no face left.

With a final “Assalamu-alaioum” they walked up the gangway, Munirah chaperoned by Mohammed Ali’s wife. From the deck they waved their last farewells.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

The moorings were loosed. Two blasts of the steam horn drowned the voices on the wharf and sent the watchers' fingers to their ears. The engines began to turn, and the ship veered slowly from the wharf. As she moved out into the stream and began to steam down the river towards the signal station countless canoes, decked with many-coloured flags and pennants, put out from the banks, with beating gongs. Long after the ship had rounded the bend that hid them from sight the pilgrims could hear that melodious music, wishing God's speed to those fortunate ones who, after years of pinching and scraping, planning and patient waiting, had begun their pilgrimage.

Although Munirah was now a free woman—her status corresponding to that of a widow—Chale saw little of her on the three days' passage to Singapore, and then only in the presence of her chaperon.

On reaching Singapore they went out to Kampong Geylang, a Malay village, to stay in the house of Abdul Gapur, a friend of Mohammed Ali, who made Chale welcome. His attitude was not entirely disinterested, although the profit he expected was spiritual rather than financial, for while he would not accept a cent for his hospitality he was aware that Chale intended to become a Muslim and knew that anyone who helped to bring another into the faith would acquire virtue in the eyes of God, and the acquisition of such pahlah is tremendously important to every true believer.

Chale's experience of Malay food and mode of life saved him from any feeling of physical or mental discomfort, but he was experiencing a sensation of intense excitement now that the time of his conversion was at

THE CONVERSION OF DAVID CHALE

hand. He felt it essential to waste no time in becoming publicly converted, and on the evening after his arrival he pronounced the Kalima Shahadah before a Malay friend of Abdul Gapur. This formal declaration of faith was a simple ceremony, yet Chale felt intensely keyed up as he spoke the Arabic words of the Muslim creed in the presence of a room full of witnesses:

"I believe in God and the oneness of God, and that Mohammed is the true Prophet of God."

Once he had given utterance to those words a curious sensation of calm settled upon his restless spirit. It was like a blessing. He felt at peace. All anxiety left him. Psychologically, it was doubtless due to the relaxation of the tension under which he had been living for the past six months. He had done what he had intended to do for years. Now there was no going back. He felt immeasurably glad, ineffably content.

After his conversion Abdul Gapur took him about to the houses and social gatherings of the village; it was important that he should obtain as much experience of Muslim custom as he could. One day they went to a funeral. Chale was still wearing a tussore silk suit and he heard one or two people in the house asking (without open impoliteness) why an unbeliever had come among them. But as soon as Abdul Gapur told them that his guest had become a Muslim their attitude changed to genuine friendliness. Chale heard it said that even the corpse in the coffin would share the pahlah which would accrue to all in the house from his conversion.

For years he had been associating with Malays; with many he had been on terms of friendship. He had been more intimate with them than any other European in

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Sarawak. They had always received him warmly. Their behaviour to him had been unexceptionable. So much so that until he began to go among them as a Muslim he did not realize the barrier that had existed between the European follower of Christ and the Malay follower of Mohammed. Now they accepted him as one of themselves. Theirs was a friendship not of the lips, but of the heart. They were prepared to do anything for him. He could have stayed a year in any house in the village without paying a cent.

Abdul Gapur warned him, however, that his first declaration of faith would not be enough, and strongly advised him to pronounce the Shahadah again before a Muslim who was an Arab. Chale agreed. He had learned that a Muslim will attach, or feign to attach, slight importance to a declaration made before one whom he considers of lower religious status than himself, partly from the suspicion with which all Muslims regard converts until they have proved themselves, and partly from the wish to acquire merit by bringing a new believer to Islam. Chale was well aware that he would be confronted by the suspicion of the Arabs when he reached Jeddah, and he was anxious to obtain from a Muslim of high standing a document that would establish his good faith.

Abdul Gapur decided that the proper person for the purpose would be Said Mulana, an Arab, a very holy man and imam of an important Singapore mosque.

They found him in a little stone house beside the mosque, sitting cross-legged on a carpet spread on a raised platform at one end of the room. He was dressed in long white robes, girt with a red sash. On his head he wore a turban of pure white Karachi cotton. His

THE CONVERSION OF DAVID CHALE

face was thin and pointed, with hollow cheeks and a sharp nose above a snow-white beard. His eyes, the rims of which had been darkened with kohl, were bright and shrewd; humour and fanaticism alternated in their expression, and they gave his aged face a look of intense vitality and intelligence.

Abdul Gapur and Chale gave him the Arab greeting:
“ Assalamu-alaikoum! May peace be upon you, and the blessing of God!”

“ Wa-alaikumus-salam, wa-rahmat-ullah. And upon you be peace,” responded the Imam, holding out his hand, which Abdul Gapur kissed with deep respect.

Chale was presented, and Abdul Gapur then asked leave to depart.

When they were alone Mulana fixed Chale with his piercing dark eyes.

“ Hold out your right hand,” he said.

Chale did so, and the Imam anointed it with atah, the perfumed essence distilled from the flowers of Taif in the Arabian hills.

“ They tell me you have become a Muslim,” he said.
“ Is that true? ”

“ It is, holy one,” replied Chale.

“ Have you ever looked at the stars at night? ”

“ I have.”

“ How many are there? ”

“ They are as countless as the grains of sand on the seashore.”

“ Have you looked at the sun in his splendour? ”

“ I have.”

“ Have you looked at the moon in the glory of her fullness? ”

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

“Indeed, yes.”

“And do they depart from men’s sight, the moon in the daytime and the sun at night?”

“They do.”

“Who created them?”

“God.”

“But was not the sun made by one god, and the moon by one god, and the stars by yet another?”

“No, holy one.”

“Ah, then there is but one God?”

“There is but one God.”

“That is well,” declared the Imam, with satisfaction. “Then let me hear you pronounce the declaration of faith.”

He held out his slim brown hand to Chale, who took it reverently and once more repeated the Shahadah:

“I believe in God and the oneness of God, and that Mohammed is the true Prophet of God.”

“Thanks be to God!” said Mulana, releasing Chale’s hand. “I accept you into the faith of Islam as a true believer.”

Chale breathed a sigh of relief. His emotion under the examination had been so intense that beads of sweat were standing out on his forehead.

“Remember that you obey the teaching of the Holy Koran,” the Imam said. “Be not like a perverse porter who calls upon God only when under the load, but when you are in safety be steadfast in prayer and give thanks to him for all his mercies. God is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, and God suffices for a guardian. With him is the reward of this world and of the next, and he both hears and sees: he knows what you keep

THE CONVERSION OF DAVID CHALE

secret and what you disclose, and he has prepared for those who misbelieve a grievous woe!"

"I will obey," said Chale humbly.

"Do not misunderstand me, brother," Mulana continued. "Islam does not seek to make things difficult for its people. It seeks to make things easy. The essence of its teaching is peace. Its aim is to weld the people of all races, whatever be the colour of their skins, into one harmonious brotherhood, owing allegiance to the one God and no other."

"It is my greatest hope to further that aim," said Chale.

"Thanks be to God," replied Mulana. "They tell me you are going upon the Haj?"

"That is my intention, if God be willing."

"A worthy one, yet there indeed you may find the way hard. Do not imagine you will be able to enter Mecca easily. Many will greet you with fair words on their lips but distrust in their minds, for, as my people say, everything with a crooked neck is not a camel, and different men have different hearts. The journey is no ordinary one and from time immemorial has been attended with trials and tribulations. Go, if you will, but only if you are filled with great determination, enough to overcome all difficulties and to keep your mind from turning aside from your fixed purpose until its end is reached. Be not as a heap of rushes which catches fire to-day and to-morrow is but ashes." He paused. Then he said, his eyes still on Chale's:

"Now, brother, you have heard my warning. Do you still wish to go?"

"My mind is made up, and nothing but the will of God can change my resolve," declared Chale.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

"That is well. Then be not afraid. And while you are waiting to sail you are free to use one of my houses which are here, close by the mosque. If you require instruction or enlightenment fail not to call upon me at any hour of the day or night. Should you want aid, I am at your service."

Chale thanked him, but explained that Abdul Gapur was his host.

"Then I must ask you, have you ample provision for the journey?"

"I am so provided, thanks be to God."

"Al-hamdu-lillah! All praise is due to God. Then go, and may you return safely and with a peaceful mind. May God bless you and help you. Be not concerned with the cost of the journey, for God will repay you. And I will give you a letter to one of the sheikhs of Mecca. It may serve you usefully. Now let us recite the Fatihah."

In a clear firm voice the old man began to intone that lovely prayer, the first chapter of the Koran, in which Chale joined him.

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Master of the Day of Requital. Thee do we serve, and thee do we beseech for help. Guide us in the right path, the path of those to whom thou hast shown grace, not of those who earn thy wrath, or of those who go astray."

Chale rose to go.

"Remember, brother," said Mulana, "when you are upon your way, that the tongue is the neck's enemy, and that hasty words are answered by a blow. And do not

THE CONVERSION OF DAVID CHALE

throw a stone into the well from which you drink, but be grateful to them who befriend you, for he who gives not thanks to man gives not thanks to God."

Although Imam Maluna had offered one of his houses rent free with the customary Arab hospitality, Chale found that he had no scruples about accepting the alms which were diffidently offered according to custom; nor was he above earning a sum in commission by recommending Chale to a sheikh in Mecca who was a friend of his. He gave the promised letter, but Chale discovered that it would have small effect with anyone but the particular person to whom it was addressed, and little enough with him unless Chale chose to name him as his sheikh: and this he did not yet wish to commit himself to do.

He was therefore still faced with the problem of obtaining some conclusive proof that would convince the authorities in the Hedjaz that he was a true Muslim. After earnest consideration he decided to approach the secretary of the Muslim Missionary Society in Singapore, whose activities are financed by voluntary contributions collected in India and by a worthy supporter of Islam in Singapore named Said Ibrahim Alsagoff.

He found the secretary, Khalil Anwari, strangely different from Imam Mulana, the contrast being due to Khalil Anwari's contact with the West, which was epitomized by his invariably being addressed as "Mr." He was an extremely learned man and had been brought to Malaya to carry out the policy of the Society, which was, as a result of the educational reaction in India, to advance the cause of Islam by adopting the methods used by Christian missions, and by propaganda in the form of a

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

monthly publication with intelligent articles on Islamic affairs.

He was a thin spare man, about thirty-five, and dressed in European clothes, but wore a fez. He spoke to Chale in perfect English and asked him if he were quite certain that he wanted to make his conversion openly, pointing out that several Europeans had made their declaration in secret, owing to force of circumstances. Chale knew that he was referring to the attitude of European Governments and firms to any of their officers or employees who became Muslims, and he assured Mr Khalil Anwari that he was his own master and had neither the desire nor the intention of entering Islam by stealth.

Mr Khalil Anwari appeared to be impressed by his sincerity, and Chale recited the Shahadah for the third time. Then Mr Khalil Anwari gave him a certificate stating that he had received him into the faith, and bestowed upon him his Muslim name, Abdul Rahman. Chale went away under the impression that he had at last obtained what he needed—definite evidence of his conversion. He had yet to learn that, through no fault of Mr Khalil Anwari, it would prove to be valueless outside Muslim countries controlled by the British.

He had been so busy attending to the details of his conversion that he had had no opportunity to make any arrangements for his marriage to Munirah, whom he was permitted to see only in the presence of her chaperon. It was characteristic of him that he should have done his utmost to prepare his way to Mecca before going farther with the secondary consideration of his wedding. But now that he had made his final declaration and had

THE CONVERSION OF DAVID CHALE

obtained the certificate he wanted, he gave the matter his attention, only to find that it was not going to be so easy as he had supposed.

The problem was, who would give Munirah away? Her parents were not with her, and unfortunately Mohammed Ali had omitted to procure a letter from them authorizing him to act as wali, their proxy. Yet a wali she must have before the Imam would marry her. What were they to do?

Then Abdul Gapur bethought him of the customary law which provides that if a Muslim girl who wishes to marry is more than sixty miles away from her parents, the Imam may act as wali. Chale appealed to the Imam, but since he was to conduct the wedding ceremony he preferred to delegate his powers to the Khatib, another functionary of the mosque.

On the day of the ceremony Chale was not allowed to see Munirah: the wali acted as intermediary between them. First he went to Munirah and whispered in her ear:

“Are you willing to marry this man?”

On her assenting he went to Chale and said:

“Are you willing to marry this girl as agreed?”

“I am,” declared Chale.

The wali then reported to the Imam, who took Munirah’s hand in his and charged her to repeat these words after him:

“I accept marriage with you, Abdul Rahman, in consideration of a gold bride-gift of a hundred dollars in ready money.”

The Imam then went to the room in which Chale was, and when Chale had accepted the contract in the same

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

terms he read the customary chapters from the Koran, chanted some prayers, and declared the marriage duly solemnized, ending with the benediction: "May God bless you and bestow his blessing upon you, and unite you both in goodness." A banquet followed, after which Munirah retired to the women's quarters, and Chale to his. There was not then, or later, any question of consummating the marriage, since both parties were going upon the Haj, so that their continued segregation was taken as a matter of course by every one in the house.

One of Chale's and Munirah's first acts after their marriage was to make a niat, a votive promise which must be fulfilled when a desired purpose has been achieved: a ceremony which, though sanctioned by Muslim custom, is older than Islam, no doubt older than history itself. The ancient Greeks observed it, and seamen of all ages, races and faiths; to this day it is a rite hallowed by the Church of Rome, although it is not confined to Catholics, since it ministers to something deeply rooted in the human mind.

Many Malays make a niat that if they reach Mecca they will give away their height in gold when they return. When the time for fulfilment comes the payer of the vow invites his friends to a feast. A thin gold wire is carefully measured to the exact height of the host, and is then cut into small pieces, one of which is given to every guest.

Chale and Munirah made their vows in a mosque standing on the top of a hill in Singapore, a very holy place, where lay the remains of a Muslim saint named Abib-Noh. Chale had been suffering from a tiresome skin trouble, and he vowed that he would bathe in the



DAVID CHALE

THE CONVERSION OF DAVID CHALE

holy water of Mecca, and, if cured, would scatter a measure of lentils to the pigeons of the Holy City, while Munirah promised that if she reached Mecca she would distribute two dollars in alms to the poor. Before they left, the keeper of the mosque gave them two small pieces of yellow cloth, which he tore from the covering of the saint's coffin, explaining that the cloth was charged with a power that would help them to redeem their vows.

Chale's next move was to procure the passages to Jeddah. It was then October, and the actual pilgrimage would not take place until March; but Malay pilgrims are accustomed to set out several months earlier than the Muslims who live nearer Mecca. They like to visit the tomb of the Prophet at Medina as soon after their arrival in the Hedjaz as possible, to reach Mecca in time to spend the fasting month of Ramadan there, and to have plenty of time to pursue their studies before the actual date of the Haj. The Egyptians, on the other hand, usually elect to arrive at Jeddah a few days before the Haj and go on to Medina after they have been to Mecca. So that the average sojourn of the Malay pilgrim in the Hedjaz is four months against the Egyptian's one. A Malay has to travel far to reach the Holy City, while an Egyptian can reach it in four or five days. It is but natural that a short stay will not satisfy a pilgrim whose home is far away. It is the great event of his life, and can seldom be repeated. Moreover, the Egyptians speak Arabic and can master Islamic teaching without difficulty, while the Malays have to study the language before they can read the Koran intelligently.

Chale too had determined to reach the Hedjaz in good time, for he recognized that he had much to learn. In

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Kuching he had had the foresight to have both his and Munirah's passports endorsed for Arabia (that had been before the announcement of his intentions at the tiffin party), and, hearing that a pilgrim ship was sailing in a few days, he went round to the offices of the Blue Funnel Line to obtain two first-class passages to Jeddah.

At once he encountered suspicion. The clerk, a pawky young man whose face was an archipelago of pimples, demanded Chale's reasons for wishing to go to Jeddah. Chale felt like asking what the hell that had to do with him, but judged it prudent not to. So he replied that he wanted to study local conditions and added that he was a Muslim.

Pawky Face became definitely hostile.

"I couldn't think of granting these passages without consulting the Colonial Secretary," he said pompously.

"Why not?" asked Chale, with more than a hint of truculence in his tone.

Pawky Face muttered something about "international complications." It was a phrase Chale disliked. He felt like leaning across the counter and punching Pawky Face on the jaw, but instead of doing so he inquired when he could have an answer.

"Well, as you know, the Colonial Secretary is a very busy man, but I'll do what I can to get something through by to-morrow."

When Chale returned next day he found Pawky Face even less amenable than before. Having been fortified by official backing, he was wallowing in the pleasures of obstructionism.

"The Secretariat take a very serious view of the case," he told Chale. "I am directed to inform you that your

to throw a spanner into the works. But how were he and Munirah to get away?

By this time he was on the waterfront, near Johnston's Quay. As he looked out on the crowded harbour he saw a cargo ship flying the Italian ensign and the Blue Peter. Inspiration came. Why travel by the pilgrim ship at all? The Italian ship would be certain to call at Port Said, and from there Munirah and he could get back to Jeddah. Thanks to the Abyssinian trouble and the strained relations between Great Britain and Italy the Italian agents would not be likely to report his movements to the Secretariat. They would merely render a return of passengers to the immigration authorities, who were unlikely to be interested.

A few inquiries brought him to the agents of the line. The ship, the *Col-de-Lana*, was sailing that night, first stop Colombo. Yes, he could have two passages to Port Said. He paid over the money, and hurried back to Munirah with the tickets.

They packed up, said their good-byes, and sailed in the *Col-de-Lana* that night.

Chapter VI

MUNIRAH TRANSFORMED

CHALE found that the *Col-de-Lana* suited his purpose perfectly. There were no other passengers, so that he was spared the prying curiosity of fellow-travellers and, since the Italians lack the colour prejudice of the English, Munirah was exposed to no slights from the ship's officers, all of whom met her on equal terms with consummate politeness. She and Chale were much more free than they would have been in the pilgrim ship, and he knew by long experience that in a British liner even a Trappist monk would be seduced into gregariousness by the organizers of deck sports. As it was, they had the ship to themselves, and so Chale was able to devote himself without distraction to the preparation that was necessary before they landed at Jeddah.

There was much to be done. He, and to a lesser degree Munirah herself, had to learn the ritual of the prayers and prostrations which the Arabs in Jeddah would expect them to know. Besides the five daily prayers there were many others which a good Muslim must say upon the appropriate occasion: when entering or leaving a mosque; when setting out on a journey, even if it were only to the market; on receiving a present, and at the time of almsgiving; on joining an assembly, on passing a graveyard, and on returning home; even on seeing lightning or a shooting star.

Then he had to practise the ablutions required in due

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

form before the daily prayers, first washing his hands, then rinsing his mouth and cleansing his nostrils, next washing his face, his right and left arms to the elbow, his ears, and finally his right and left feet to the ankle, ending by reciting the Shahadah.

These ablutions are required of every Muslim unless he is on a journey, when he may be given dispensation for three days and three nights, or in sickness and times of drought, when he may cleanse his body with sand. Chale had long since realized that although these simple rites were first enjoined upon men and women who lived their lives in desert places, yet their underlying intention was no less significant to those who lived in the changed conditions of civilization, since physical cleanliness was symbolical of spiritual purity.

For his own satisfaction, and also that the Arabs might not find him wanting in his knowledge of the Islamic law, Chale continued to read the Koran diligently until he came to know by heart its teaching, which provides a spiritual code for every phase of human conduct. How wise, he thought, were its injunctions against avarice, which, being poverty, made a man restless and ultimately stripped him of all the virtues; against anger, which corrupted faith as the juice of bitter syrup corrupts honey; against envy, which consumed men's good actions as fire consumed wood; against suspicion, which was the greatest falsehood; against slander and quarrelling, which the Koran proclaimed to be more grievous than adultery, and so forbade a Muslim to break off relations with his fellows for more than three days; against pride, which was the rejection of truth and the despising of others, so that a man might not enter Paradise with one atom of

pride harboured in his heart; against usury, which although it might increase a man's worldly wealth would not increase his riches with God; against debt, which must be discharged before a Muslim might enter Paradise, although its remission would earn merit upon the Day of Requital.

Nor was the law of Islam one of prohibition only. He found comfort and strength in its constructive adjurations. It exhorted a man to respect the ties of blood, which were suspended from the Throne of God and might not be cut asunder without dire penalties in the Hereafter; to purify his wealth by distribution of alms; to be fair in speech and to grant pardon; to do good to his parents even though they had injured him, since he who wished to enter Paradise might do so best by pleasing his father and his mother; to treat his wife tenderly, and if he were displeased with one bad quality in her to admire another quality which was good; to treat children affectionately and to be kind to orphans, so that in the next world he and the Prophet should be as close as two fingers upon his hand.

The more deeply Chale read the better did he come to understand how completely the Malays had accepted the Koran's teaching on good manners. "No father has given his children anything better than good manners," the Prophet had said, and promised a place in Paradise to him who left off quarrelling even though he were in the right. The Koran taught that there was no distinction like good manners, which would be the weightiest thing in the balance of the believer on the Day of Requital, whence had come the Malay saying, "A debt of money may be paid, but a debt of manners must be carried to

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

the grave." The Koran's teaching on the duty of a man towards his neighbours appealed to him as part of good manners, too. God cared not for the worship of a man who spent much time in prayer but abused his neighbours, and held him in high esteem who tried to do good to those about him, even though he neglected prayer and gave but little in alms, for none was a perfect Muslim who had a full belly and left his neighbours hungry, and whoever visited the sick swam in a sea of mercy.

Chale was impressed, too, by the injunctions to observe those little friendly acts which smooth the path of life, such as the salutation of friends and strangers, the rider greeting him who went on foot, the walker greeting him who was seated. Then there were the exhortations to hospitality. The Prophet had said that whoever believed in God and the hereafter must respect his guests; for a day and a night he must treat them with special honour, and entertain them without payment for three days more, and he must accompany them to the door of his house when they pursued their way.

Intellectually the teaching of Islam appealed to Chale by its insistence on the importance of knowledge and wisdom. The Prophet said, "God hath not created anything better than wisdom," and promised that the Muslim who had performed prayers, fasts, charity, pilgrimage and all other good works would be rewarded ultimately only according to the measure of his wisdom.

Chale found comfort in the assurance that forgiveness was promised to those who sincerely repented of their sins, and saw how profoundly affected the Muslim world had been by the Islamic teaching that death was but a meeting of brother with brother, not to be sought, in-

MUNIRAH TRANSFORMED

deed, as release from worldly affliction (for suicides in this world would be punished by the same means in the next), but to be met with resignation, since it was a favour sent by God, and by the assurance that Paradise, which was gained by overcoming the passions, was nearer to men and women than the thongs of their sandals.

Islam, as Chale saw more clearly day by day, was a tender and compassionate faith. It showed profound understanding of man's frailty, offering him strength to sustain his life on earth and promising him reward for living rightly in the world to come, yet broad enough to tolerate religious freedom; for while the Koran enjoined its evangelists to call others "to the path of the Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation" it warned them to "have disputation in the kindest way." Mohammed had never wanted conversion by compulsion, by the sword or by the torture chamber. "Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, disbelieve": that was the Koran's teaching.

I have set down these aspects of Islam because it is important to understand their effect upon Chale's mind after his conversion. He had accepted Islam as a whole, and it is necessary to show what that acceptance implied. There were now no reservations in his faith as there had been when he was a Christian, and he found himself happier in his new spiritual life than he had ever been before.

Besides preparing himself to take his place in the Muslim world, he had to prepare Munirah to take her place in surroundings which would be very different from those she had known in Sarawak. He intended to take her to

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

England if he could not secure his visa for Jeddah in Cairo, and he realized that as a simple Malay girl she would be too conspicuous in a big city, away from her own people. But he was determined that contact with Western ideas should not spoil her as he had seen the Malays being spoiled in Sarawak. He must not destroy or even change her character, but fortify it. He must do for her what he hoped some day to do for Islam itself, adapt her to civilization without sacrificing the essentials of her personality. He must mould her to meet the conditions which would soon confront her not only in India, in Egypt, and in Europe, but also in Arabia. He wanted to save her from feeling lost or ill at ease in a world that would be new to her, partly for her own sake and partly because he knew that she might be the determining factor in his reaching Mecca, for he was well aware that the Arabs were impressed by the poise and presence of a man or woman, the degree of whose self-possession was their measure of respect.

The process of Munirah's transformation was a gradual one, and Chale conducted it with consummate tact. He never ceased to impress upon her that she must not be ashamed of her own customs, which were just as good as those of other races: but he warned her that they were different, and suggested that it would be well for her to learn the difference, so that she could go about among people of other nations without any feeling of that shame which is so mortifying to Malay sensibility.

When they embarked in the *Col-de-Lana* he decided that it would be advisable for them to have their meals in their cabin rather than join the officers in the saloon, since Munirah had never used knives and forks. Even so,

MUNIRAH TRANSFORMED

he took care not to humiliate her or to play the part of social instructor obtrusively.

On the first day out from Singapore, when the steward had set the soup on the table and had left the cabin, Chale rose and said the Muslim grace :

“In the name of God and with the blessings of God.”

Then he settled Munirah in her chair, sat down, unfolded his table-napkin, took up his spoon, and began his soup, leaving her to do the same, as though she had been accustomed to European food and European methods of carrying it to the mouth all her life ; and so with the meat and the sweet. He was delighted to see that she rose to the occasion marvellously. Her own adaptability and natural good manners made everything quite easy. She just quietly observed what he did, and then followed his example, as in a game of follow-my-leader. Of course she made a slip now and then, but that gave them something to laugh about—she was always the first to laugh—and he let her feel that although knives and forks were slightly ridiculous, yet it was the custom of the West to use them and therefore only polite to conform. But to impress upon her that fingers were as good as forks he told her the story of the Arab who, when asked by an arrogant Englishman why he did not eat his rice with a spoon instead of his fingers, replied :

“The fingers of my right hand have never entered any mouth but mine ; can you say that of your spoon ? ”

Then, at the end of the meal, Chale rose and said :

“All praise be to God who gave us food and drink and made us Muslims.”

In this way Munirah learnt Western table manners

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

without Chale appearing to teach her anything, and thus she retained her dignity and self-possession and never developed an inferiority complex. When the ship reached Colombo he thought he would put her to the test and took her ashore to dine at the Galle Face Hotel. She created a stir as she walked in, wearing the silken sarongs and jacket Chale had bought her in Singapore, with her beaded slippers on her bare feet. She was the only Oriental there, but Chale told me that she walked into that great dining-room without a trace of shyness, as though she had been feeding in European hotels all her life. Whatever she may have felt, she showed no surprise and she did not make a mistake throughout the meal.

By the time they arrived at Bombay he felt that she could hold her own anywhere. The size of the city astonished her: it was five times larger than Singapore, but what astonished her even more was to see a Muslim Indian walking in the street with his European wife, who was dressed in a sari. That widened her vision: it had not occurred to her that white women married Indians or Malays.

Then, of course, she was thrilled by the shops, grander than any she had ever seen, and she was quick to notice the fineness and improved quality of the materials; with her innate good taste she recognized that the delicately mounted jewels she saw, and the gold and silver ornaments, were preferable to the coarser and heavier ornaments to which she was accustomed.

By this time Chale had designed some clothes that would be more suitable for her to wear in public than her sarongs and Malayan jackets, and he found a tailor to make garments which were cut on a slightly different line

MUNIRAH TRANSFORMED

from the sarong and made of such materials as did not proclaim her nationality.

It is not unlikely that the transformation of Munirah gave Chale more pleasure than it gave her, for, fond as she was of pretty things, she would sometimes become tired by the attention she had to pay to them, whereupon he wisely gave her a rest.

Then came the question of underclothes. Malay women are accustomed to wear shapeless garments which ruin the line of any dress worn over them. Chale insisted that she must wear *crêpe de Chine*, and one afternoon brought back to the ship an assortment of cami-knickers. Munirah liked the look of them, she liked the feel of them, she loved their colour: but when she put them on and found the difference they made to her figure she was horrified.

"Wah," she cried, "am I a harlot to show my breasts to every man who passes?"

Of course, Chale had been expecting something like that. He knew well enough that every well-bred Malay woman considers it immodest to show the lines of her body, which the loose jacket and sarong so successfully conceal. This is in accordance with the teaching of the Koran, which enjoins women to "preserve their modesty and display not their charms," except to their husbands and male relatives, and to the children, "who do not note the nakedness of women," and, furthermore, to throw their scarves over their breasts and to draw their veils over their faces.

Chale did not press the matter, and put the underclothes aside, but next day when they were walking in the streets of Bombay he saw Munirah looking intently at the Indian Muslim women dressed in European or semi-European

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

fashion. She had to admit that they looked well, and when he suggested to her that the Koran was treating of fashions over a thousand years old she went back to the ship, put on a pair of pale blue cami-knickers, then the satin sarong and silk jumper over them, and in the mirror regarded the outline of her breasts with complacency. But for all that, she did not neglect to say the prayer prescribed on wearing new clothes:

“All praise be to God who clothed me with this garment and granted it to me without my power and might.”

Chale found it more difficult to induce her to wear shoes. She clung to her bead slippers. But finally he persuaded her to wear sandals, of European make, at first with no heels, and then with low ones, as her feet became accustomed to confinement. Stockings she resolutely refused to put on, but he warned her that they might be necessary in the cooler climate of Port Said.

The ship was held up in Bombay for several days owing to cargo delay, and that gave Chale the chance to go a step farther. Muslims of both sexes cut their nails very short, so that they may be in no danger of carrying dirt. But Munirah had noticed other women’s fingers; finally she allowed hers to be manicured, and was delighted with the appearance of her half-moons, which she had never seen before.

Then Chale began on her face. Fortunately she had never blackened her teeth by chewing betel-nut, and although most Malay women file their teeth level and cap them with gold she had not done so, perhaps because she had an instinctive knowledge that the custom was ugly. The result was that her teeth were perfect. They were pure

MUNIRAH TRANSFORMED

white, and she kept them so by means of wood-ash and salt, rubbing them with her fingers outside and in.

No dentist could have improved her teeth, but Chale showed her that she might make up her face with better effect. Muslim women are allowed to beautify themselves for their husbands, but when they go out they are expected to cover their faces. They make up their eyes with kohl, which is prepared from galena, and besides enhancing the beauty of their eyes it keeps them in good condition and prevents the rims from becoming red; but they try to whiten their faces with powder, and the result is disastrous. When Munirah saw the way in which other women in Bombay made up their faces she discarded her white powder and Chale bought her some which matched her glorious brown skin. He also laid in a stock of creams and lipstick, so that by the time she left Bombay she was well equipped, and would spend hours a day making up before her mirror, although before she looked into it she was careful to recite the Muslim woman's prayer:

“All praise is due to God. Oh, God, beautify my spirit as thou hast created my body beautiful, and preserve my face from the fire of hell.”

It is essential to make clear Chale's personal attitude to this transformation experiment. Before the ship had reached the Red Sea he had changed Munirah from a good-looking Malay village girl to a lovely woman who would attract admiration in any capital in Europe. How successful he had been I was able to judge from a photograph which had been taken before she left Sarawak; under his guidance she had developed in just the way a schoolgirl blossoms into a young lady of fashion. The material had been there, and Chale had simply made the

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

most of it. He enjoyed doing it; I suppose it appealed to the artist in him, although that was only a secondary consideration. His main object was to turn Munirah into a woman who would be able to take her place anywhere as his wife. But he did not beautify her for his own personal satisfaction. That is to say, he was not in love with her. She did not even attract him physically. Perhaps it is fairer to say that attraction simply did not enter into their relationship. In other circumstances no doubt it would have done, but, as it was, the spiritual purpose of his enterprise outweighed every other consideration. By this time she had become dear to him; he was attentive to her, and he was touched by her trust in him. But he did not desire her as a woman any more than she desired him as a man.

To anyone but a Muslim it may seem incredible that a man who was in full possession of his virile faculties could share a cabin for weeks on end with a lovely creature like Munirah without wanting her. I myself should have found it difficult to believe if Chale had not assured me, most earnestly, that this was true. Not only was it true but it was clearly unthinkable to both of them that they could have behaved otherwise, and Munirah herself frankly confirmed this. Neither took any smug credit for it: to them it was a matter of course. Munirah assured me that no Malay husband would think of sleeping with his wife while they were on the Haj together, or for the prescribed forty days after their return. So it was with those two: what might have been passionate love-making was sublimated into spiritual concentration. Until I reached this part of their story I did not completely realize the depth of his sincerity, and hers.

MUNIRAH TRANSFORMED

All this time, Chale assured me, Munirah was never homesick, and never complained: that would not have been in accordance with the tenets of Islam; and to have gone back would have been unthinkable, for the shame would have been too great. Chale, on his side, never doubted that he would get to Mecca. They were extraordinarily happy together, linked by a spiritual purpose which transcended everything else.

Chale did not under-estimate the difficulties which lay before him, however, and as the *Col-de-Lana* steamed up the Suez Canal he decided that it would be unwise to leave the ship at Port Said and try to get his visa at Cairo, as he had intended. The setback in Singapore had made him cautious, and after much deliberation he came to the conclusion that it might be easier to obtain the visa in London than in Cairo. The authorities in Cairo would almost certainly be suspicious of him, and there he had no strings to pull. If they turned him down he might never reach Jeddah. But if he went on to London the fact that he was a British subject might impress the Arabian Legation. So, bearing in mind that the Koran said that those who have patience shall be blessed, he determined to go on in the *Col-de-Lana* to Marseilles.

It was cold in Port Said, and he had little difficulty in persuading Munirah to wear stockings and the warm clothing he had bought for her in Bombay. But it was colder still in Marseilles, where they arrived on a crisp sunny day in December, and the temperature was below zero when they reached Paris: Munirah had never realized that such weather was possible. For the first time Chale began to worry about her and to wonder if he had been wrong in taking her to Europe in the depth of winter.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

But he bought her some more warm clothes, and although she still suffered her cheerfulness did not desert her. In fact, so far as I could gather, the only time she ever lost her equanimity was when he took her to Antoine to have her hair done.

By this time she was taking an enthusiastic interest in her appearance, and she needed no persuasion to go to Antoine when Chale told her he was the most famous hairdresser in Paris. Since she could not speak any language but Malay Chale went in with her and, in his imperious way, refused to have the advice of anyone but Antoine himself.

Munirah sat quietly composed, although it was a strange experience for her to sit in that great salon with so many other women who were all undergoing what seemed to her varying forms of torture. She told me that what surprised her most was the number of elderly women there hoping to be made beautiful; for in Sarawak once a woman has passed the age of thirty she does not bother about her looks.

Then Antoine appeared.

For a moment he stood considering her thick black hair, which, in the Malay fashion, she brushed straight back from her forehead into a bun at the back of her neck, transfixied by a gold hairpin.

Antoine removed the pin, and the hair fell in a straight thick tide far below her waist. Then he made his decision. The hair of madame was beautiful. But nowadays you could have too much of a good thing. It was too long for the mode. It was too thick. Positively it must be thinned out and cut: no, not quite short, but shorter. Chale, who was feeling, for once in his life, rather unequal to the situa-

MUNIRAH TRANSFORMED

tion which confronted him, acquiesced and told Antoine to go ahead, warning Munirah not to be afraid.

Munirah was not afraid, but when she found great thick locks of the hair she had been so proud of being taken away she rebelled for the first time. Her hands went up to her head in defence. She begged Chale to make Antoine stop. Antoine became persuasive. Munirah was adamant. Antoine gesticulated in expostulation. Every face in the salon turned towards them. Munirah began to cry. Chale, much embarrassed, tried to pacify her. He assured her that she would like it when it was done. She didn't want to look different from every one else, did she? Munirah sobbed, but shook her head. Well, then, she must let them get on with it. Another sob. She must remember that she wasn't a village girl any longer. Without a word she took her hands from her head and submitted, tears rolling down her smooth brown cheeks.

A few minutes later her hair reached only to her shoulders, and she was watching with apprehension the number of eggs that were being broken for her shampoo. Wah, what kind of place was it where they used hen's eggs for women's hair, and little brushes for the eyelashes? But when Antoine had done with her and she looked at herself in the glass she beamed with delight. Chale had been right. It was the finishing touch. She had not known she could look so beautiful. Her confidence both in him and Antoine was restored.

They did not stay long in Paris, for Chale was anxious to get on. He decided that they would fly to London as part of Munirah's education. As they reached Le Bourget Airport snow began to fall. It was the first time she had seen snow. In her excitement she forgot what Chale had

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

told her about it, and wanted to know where all the hen's feathers came from that were falling on their coats and umbrellas.

Of course, Chale had explained to her about aeroplanes, but even so he was prepared for her to be nervous when the time came. Perhaps she might have been, had not two little English girls been travelling by the same machine.

"When I saw those children," she told me, "I thought to myself, if they are not frightened how can I be?"

Then her spirit became calm. She was fortified by the conviction that whatever danger she might incur was all part of the test which she must pass to enable her to reach Mecca. So when Chale murmured a few words of reassurance in her ear as she entered the aeroplane she replied:

"Why should I be frightened of anything? Have I not staked my whole life in the trust that God will bring us to the Holy City?"

It was a rough passage, against a forty-mile-an-hour gale, and worse than anything Munirah had expected. But she said to herself, "If the flying ship falls all will be killed, not I alone."

In that thought she found consolation, hugging herself every time a bump came until they reached Croydon.

Chale was proud of her.

Chapter VII

VISA FOR JEDDAH

ON the way from Croydon to Victoria in the Imperial Airways omnibus Munirah had her first impressions of London. That drive is not an impressive entry into the capital of the British Empire, but it gave her an idea of London's vastness. Bombay had seemed to her an out-size in cities, but here was one that dwarfed Bombay. The things that surprised her were the double-decker buses, but she spent most of her time ministering to a woman who had been so sick in the aeroplane that she was almost in a state of collapse.

When they reached Victoria she looked hard at the porter who took their baggage. He was a cheerful fellow, and she heard him laughing with one of his mates as he went on ahead of them. She clutched Chale's arm excitedly.

"That porter," she said. "Look, he's Hardy!"

"Hardy?" echoed Chale, mystified.

"Yes, the fat one of those funny men we saw on the picture in Bombay. The ones who laughed so much."

"Laurel and Hardy, you mean?"

"Yes, yes, that's it! He must be Hardy. I'm sure he is. He's just as fat, and he laughs the same way."

"No," said Chale. "That's not Hardy. He's just a porter."

But Munirah was not convinced.

Chale had ordered his car to meet them at Victoria, and

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

drove Munirah straight to his flat. The telegram he had sent from Paris had gone astray, with the result that his housekeeper, Mrs Cumberbatch, was not expecting them. Mrs Cumberbatch was a portly lady with an ample bosom and steel-rimmed spectacles. She had her own ideas on the subject of respectability. People from foreign parts Mrs Cumberbatch held to be rarely respectable, particularly when you couldn't understand a word they said; when they were attractive young women with brown skins they were clearly heathens as well as abandoned hussies.

But Mrs Cumberbatch had a good job, and knew it. So that when Chale presented Munirah as his wife she showed no open hostility. She merely permitted herself an incredulous sniff and then met the situation with studied silence, busying herself with setting the flat to rights, and lighting fires to warm the icy rooms.

It was a dreary home-coming, and since Munirah was missing the sun rather badly Chale decided that the best thing he could do would be to give her a good dose of artificial light. So he rang up the Berkeley and booked a table for dinner. He thought it would cheer her up to go out, and he wanted to test his experiment by seeing what effect she would have on English people: whether she would excite admiration or merely attract attention.

Munirah dressed herself in her best. She wore a sarong of peach satin, edged with crimson and royal blue brocade, a close-fitting coat of black, silver, and gold lamé with a pattern of leaves and trees on it, and a flowing piece of green and silver tissue over her head and shoulders, kept in place by two gold clips above her temples. On her feet were silver sandals, with a touch of crimson. Her hands were manicured, and she wore thirty thin gold

VISA FOR JEDDAH

Malay bangles on her left wrist. Her eyes and face were made up perfectly. She must have looked glorious. She would have done credit to a prince.

When they reached the Berkeley Chale showed her the ladies' room and told her to leave the black velvet cloak he had bought her in Paris. She went in obediently, but a moment later darted out again and caught him by the arm. She couldn't go into that place, she protested. Indeed she couldn't! Not alone, with all those women staring at her. What was she to say to the attendant? She couldn't speak a word of English. They would laugh at her, and then she would be shamed. He mustn't make her go in.

Chale was touched. It brought home to him how completely dependent on him she was, in spite of her strength of character and resolution. He soothed her, helped her off with the cloak and flung it over his arm, and then led her to their table. Once at his side again, she instantly recovered her composure, and he, man-like, was delighted at the admiring glances he saw cast at her as she passed through the crowded restaurant, looking as radiant as a humming-bird. His sharp eyes left him in no doubt as to the effect she was creating: it was not the effect of the bizarre but the effect of beauty, for when a lovely woman, rightly gowned, enters a room full of strangers she causes an immediate response in the faces of those who see her—a silent tribute to perfection, an unspoken acclamation of something close to the Divine. Such, Chale told me, was the reaction of the men and women at the Berkeley that night to Munirah's appearance, and I can well believe him.

She had passed the first test; but there was another to

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

come. Dinner at the Berkeley, he knew, would be a greater ordeal for her than dinner at the Galle Face had been. Nor did he spare her by ordering a simple meal. Never had she been confronted with so many courses, so many strange dishes, or such an array of knives and forks. But she did not fail him. Everything went off admirably. She was not even defeated by the caviare.

For a while they watched the dancing—Munirah found it hard to understand how the women knew where to put their feet as the men wanted them to—and then he took her to a box at the Palladium, where she was enraptured by the acrobats and amazed by some dancers with “feet on wheels.” She swayed to and fro with laughter at two slapstick comedians, twisting about in real enjoyment and putting her hand to her mouth in a typically Malayan gesture which is incredibly attractive—in a Malay. Chale was pleased to see how observant she was becoming, for although she was as excited by the show as an unsophisticated child, what struck her critical attention most was how much cleaner the artists’ costumes were than those she had seen at a revue in Paris.

London delighted her, except for its sunless skies. They went shopping together, they went to the Zoo, they went to cinemas. Munirah developed a craving for cowboy pictures; the ceilings of the cinemas impressed her, so ornate and covered with gold. He tried her with sightseeing, but although she admired the fine symmetry of Regent Street he found that ancient buildings did not interest her. She disliked the City churches particularly, and would not even look at them when he tried to point out the beauties of their architecture. She refused to go into St Paul’s Cathedral, but the tameness of the pigeons

VISA FOR JEDDAH

amused her, and she spent ten minutes happily feeding them from a penny bag of maize.

She preserved her poise and dignity magnificently amid her new surroundings, but occasionally she had a qualm : the first time she went in a lift at Selfridge's she was afraid they would drop to the bottom ; in the Underground she was nervous lest "the stairs that walk" should pinch her legs, and lest the tunnels should fall in and crush her; nor was she at all sure that those double-decker buses would not overturn. The height of the houses amazed her, and she wondered that the people who lived in them were not afraid they would be blown down by the wind; and in Hyde Park she imagined the leafless trees to be dead, and asked why they were not cut down, until Chale explained that it was only in the tropics that trees had leaves all the year round and that those she saw would bud again in the spring.

The size of the London policemen astonished her : it would be easy for them to catch criminals, she thought, when they were so big. She was surprised to see Japanese in European clothes, quite happy and at ease, and marvelled that they should be brave enough to eat in restaurants by themselves. At first it came as a shock to her to see Europeans doing manual labour—since in the East no white men labour with their hands—but she soon began to distinguish between the different classes of people she encountered.

But she assured me that what surprised her most was how little notice people took of her in the streets and shops. On her first night in London Chale had shown her the electric signs in Piccadilly and Leicester Square as they drove from the Berkeley to the Palladium. He

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

suggested that they should get out of the car so that she could see them better and be able to tell her friends about them when she returned to Sarawak.

"No," she said. "Don't let's stop. People would stare at us!"

She soon found, however, that people did not stare. If anyone looked at her and saw that she was uncomfortable he would instantly avert his eyes. In Paris it had been very different; she had been almost mobbed in the Galeries Lafayette. Her instinct told her that the attitude of the English was not indifference, but good manners. No people in the world have better manners than the Malays, and the good manners of the Londoners, not only in the streets, but wherever she went—in buses, in taxis, in shops, in restaurants—endeared them to her and made her feel at home. They were so different from the Europeans she had known in the East. In London people were modest and polite, anxious to please and to save her trouble. In the East many of them had been arrogant, rude, loud-voiced, and selfish, overbearing to those whose skins were not white like their own, lifted (as she began to understand) from middle-class homes into a heady luxury to which they were unaccustomed. Munirah had been afraid that every one in London would be like that. Indeed, she told me that the thought of it had made her dread coming to England, although she had been prepared to bear it as part of the test. When she found she had been wrong she experienced an immense relief. Even Mrs Cumberbatch, who at first had chilled her, melted before her enchanting smile and her merry ways.

One night, to discover her reactions to Western music, Chale took her to see *Carmen* at Sadler's Wells. It is a

VISA FOR JEDDAH

good opera for a beginner : there is nothing abstruse about the music, and the story has all the ingenuous elements of frank melodrama, which he was able to outline to her before the curtain rose. The house was packed, the audience tumultuously enthusiastic. Munirah was enthralled. Chale, watching her, saw that she was carried away by the Toreador's Song and moved to tears when Carmen died.

All this, however, was but their relaxation, and Chale had serious work on hand. Although he had his letter from Mr Khalil Anwari he felt that it would be well to approach the Arabian Legation with a personal introduction. On their first Sunday in London, therefore, he took Munirah to the Woking Mosque.

The Imam greeted them kindly, and when he learned that Chale was a Muslim did not attempt to test him in any way. He showed them over the mosque (Munirah was rather shocked to see chairs there), and then asked them to tea at his house near by.

After tea Chale told him that he intended to take Munirah on the pilgrimage.

The Imam regarded him gravely.

"How long have you been a Muslim, brother?" he asked.

"For some time," answered Chale.

"Then you will find many obstacles in your path."

"So it would seem. Yet I can't understand why. Is it not the duty of every true believer to perform the Haj, and does not the Holy Koran open the way to all?"

"It does, brother. To all who are accepted as true believers. But you have not been a Muslim all your life."

"What does that matter? I have been converted to Islam, and I have made my declaration of faith."

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

"But you are a European, brother," the Imam reminded him gently. "It is not easy for Europeans, even if they are true Muslims, to go to Mecca now. In recent years there have been white men who have performed the pilgrimage with faith upon their lips, but not within their hearts. They have gone, not to find solace for their souls, but simply to write of their adventures, to look for minerals, or for some political end. Some of them reached the Holy City. But the Arabs are wary now."

"I don't blame them," said Chale. "That is why I have come to you. Will you give me an introduction to the Arabian Minister in London?"

For a few moments the Imam sat pondering.

"God has said, 'We shall surely prove you by afflicting you in some measure,'" he told Chale at last. "Are you prepared for such a test, brother?"

"I am," declared Chale. "Did not God also promise by his Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace) that the men of truth should find a rich reward?"

"God has engraved faith on the hearts of the true believers with his own hand," quoted the Imam. "You will surely reach Mecca if it is the will of God."

"Then will you give me the letter I ask?"

"I think it would be well for you to come to a gathering of Muslims in London next Friday at twelve o'clock. We have a room near the British Museum where a few of us meet every week to pray. I will give you an answer then."

Chale agreed to go. When Friday came and he made his way to the address in Great Russell Street the Imam had given him he began to feel somewhat apprehensive. In spite of his religious study during the passage home, as yet he had had little practice in making the series of

VISA FOR JEDDAH

complicated prostrations in the presence of a congregation. Munirah had not been able to help him much, for young Malays do not pray assiduously, and the prostrations and prayers take even a Muslim weeks of practice to perfect. Nevertheless the fear of doing the wrong thing did not deter him from attending the meeting, and he decided that it would be a good opportunity to discover exactly what had to be done.

He reached the house. The room to which he was directed was long and narrow, and very cold in spite of an electric fire. It was unfurnished save for a number of prayer-mats upon the floor. Several Muslims were sitting cross-legged on the prayer-mats in their socks. Their shoes had been left outside the door. Chale hastily took off his own shoes, left them with the others, and then entered the room, greeting the company in Arabic. Every one received him with friendliness, and the conversation was continued in English. Racially they were a mixed brotherhood, but united in Islam: two Egyptians, an Arab, five Indians, a Syrian, a Turk from the Legation, all in European clothes.

A few minutes later the Imam entered, wearing a fez with his lounge suit. He proceeded to conduct the service, reciting the prayers in Arabic, and preaching a sermon in English, since that was the only language with which all present were familiar.

Feeling somewhat embarrassed, Chale had chosen a prayer-mat at the back of the room, where he hoped he would not attract undue attention. That was just as well, for he went wrong several times. As he had feared, the prostrations gave him most trouble. Friday prayers differ from those said on ordinary occasions. At first he found

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

himself making too many prostrations to each set of prayers, and was covered with confusion, but afterwards he got through by keeping an eye on the others, just as Munirah had got through her European meals by watching him.

When the service was over Chale waited until the other Muslims had gone. The Imam then came to him and said that instead of giving him a letter he would take him to the Arabian Legation and introduce him to the Minister.

They drove to Eaton Square in Chale's car. The door of the Legation was opened by an Egyptian maid-servant dressed in European clothes, who showed them into a waiting-room and took their cards.

Chale felt immensely excited. This interview would be the turning-point of his great enterprise, for which he had sacrificed so much. He had little doubt, from what the Imam had told him, that he would encounter opposition, but he was determined to overcome it. He was staking everything on obtaining the Legation's permission to go to Mecca. If he failed, he might never get there, for he knew that Cairo would do nothing for him if London refused. It must be his will against the Minister's. The knowledge that he was making his application from sincere motives gave him confidence. He composed his mind to break down suspicion by good faith.

The door opened and the Egyptian maid reappeared. The Minister was in conference, but one of the secretaries would see them. She conducted them to a well-furnished room where an Egyptian Arab was sitting at a large desk. He rose and warmly greeted the Imam, who introduced Chale as a Muslim and then, after a few moments' general conversation, withdrew.

VISA FOR JEDDAH

The secretary sat down again at his desk and motioned Chale to a chair.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, with Western directness.

Chale took his passport from his pocket.

"I want you to give me a visa to Mecca, so that I can perform the pilgrimage," he answered.

The effect of this speech was instantaneous. The secretary's urbanity hardened into wary hostility. He eyed Chale with intense suspicion.

"How long have you been a Muslim?" he demanded curtly.

"Six weeks."

"Have you any papers to support your statement that you are a Muslim?"

Chale produced the certificate Mr Khalil Anwari had given him. The secretary glanced at it.

"This is useless," he said, handing it back. "It is quite impossible for us to give you a visa."

"Why?"

"Because even if we did you would not be allowed outside the walls of Jeddah."

Chale took a deep breath. The interview was turning out as he had feared it might. He had not the slightest intention of taking the secretary's "No" for an answer, but he knew that it would be folly to lose his temper, or even appear to be put out. For a person of his natural impatience and excitability it was not easy to avoid showing his irritation, but he thought of the calm dignity with which Munirah would have faced the situation, and succeeded in gaining control of himself, just as he had in the office of the Singapore shipping agents.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

He thought it would do no harm to display his knowledge of Islam.

"Does not the Holy Koran say," he asked, "that God made the Sacred Mosque of Mecca for all believers alike? And when he commanded the Prophet (upon whom be peace) to proclaim among men the pilgrimage, did he not promise that they should come on foot and on every fleet camel, from every remote part, to pay their vows and make the circuit round the ancient House?"

"It is true," agreed the secretary, with a touch of impatience. "But for you to go to Mecca is absolutely out of the question."

"What crime have I committed that I may not have the privilege of every Muslim?"

"None, that I know of. It is impossible, that is all."

"But why, in God's name?" demanded Chale, battling for self-control.

"Because we have strict orders from King Ibn Saud that no European is to be granted a visa for Mecca unless he has been a Muslim for at least six years."

For a moment Chale was knocked out: as he put it, he felt just as though he'd been winded at Rugger. He had the identical feeling of complete helplessness. He had keyed himself up for a battle of wits. Every sense had been tremendously alert. Now his ideas scattered like a disarranged jig-saw puzzle. He felt completely frustrated. But only for a few seconds. There was too much at stake to give in. The secretary's announcement had come as a complete surprise. He had had no inkling of any such direct prohibition. He had been relying on his tact and determination to smooth over any preliminary objections. But now the Imam's veiled warnings became clear. The

VISA FOR JEDDAH

Imam had known all the time, but had not told him because no good Muslim may deter another from going on the Haj; he had merely uttered a warning, to test him, just as old Mulana had. Suddenly he felt an immense personal grievance against those bogus Muslims who had caused Ibn Saud to issue his decree. Still, they shouldn't keep him out. Master of himself again, he determined to get his way.

"Because some have worn Islam as a cloak to go to Mecca, why should I, who am as true a Muslim as you yourself, be kept out?" he asked quietly.

"It is not for me to say."

"I am not a journalist trying to scratch up copy for the Press," persisted Chale. "I have entered the faith at great personal sacrifice. I wish to fulfil myself, and to receive forgiveness for my sins."

The secretary raised his hands with the gesture of the bureaucrat who shelters safely behind the stone wall of an official regulation.

"The King's orders leave us no alternative," he declared.

"Yet the Holy Koran makes no such stipulation."

"Do you question the orders of the King? It has become necessary for him to protect the Mother of Cities against the intrusion of unbelievers, men who may be Muslims to-day and Jews or Christians to-morrow. The orders do not apply to Europeans only. There are Chinese in Jeddah who have been waiting to go on the Haj for years."

"Then give me a visa for Jeddah."

"That is also impossible. It would be useless to you unless you are prepared to wait in Jeddah for six years."

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Chale wondered if an appeal on compassionate grounds would work.

"I have travelled ten thousand miles from Sarawak to get this visa," he said. "Is all my journey to be in vain?"

"At present, I am sorry to say, it is, but no obstacle will be put in your way after the prescribed time," replied the secretary equably. "There is an Arab proverb which says that with time and patience the mulberry leaf becomes silk."

"There is another which says that he who is bashful with his wife is unlikely to get a boy by her," retorted Chale, "and if you cannot give me the visa on your own responsibility I must apply to the Minister."

"You would be wasting His Excellency's time and your own. He could only give you the same answer."

The secretary pushed the passport across the desk towards Chale to indicate that the interview was closed.

Chale did not pick it up. To have done so would have been to admit defeat, and he was not defeated yet. He saw that to go on begging for the visa would be like pealing the bell of an empty house. But disappointed though he was, he had still one card to play. It was characteristic of him that he should have tried to get what he wanted by the assertion of his own personality. But that had failed and there was only one means of persuasion left. He did not hesitate to use it. He had married Munirah and brought her to England primarily as a kind of insurance against ultimate failure. He had not realized that he would have so much difficulty, but his intuition had warned him to take no chances. He hoped now that he had been wise to trust it.

VISA FOR JEDDAH

"The King's order makes it immensely hard for my wife," he said. "Like every true Muslim the object of her life is to perform the pilgrimage. Yet, as you know, she cannot go alone."

Chale, closely watching the Arab's eyes, saw their expression change from indifference to interest.

"You did not tell me you were married," he said sharply.

"You didn't ask me," Chale pointed out.

"You say she is a Muslim?"

"Yes. A Sarawak Malay."

"You have her passport?"

"Yes."

Chale produced the document signed by the Sarawak authorities. The secretary scrutinized it through a magnifying glass.

"She is with you in London?"

"Yes. I'll bring her here if you like."

The secretary shook his head, almost shocked at the suggestion that he should interview a strange woman.

"That is unnecessary." He inspected the passport again. "This certainly alters your case," he said, with a return of his friendly manner. "I think we may be able to do something."

He took up the receiver of his telephone and spoke. A few moments later a second official appeared. They conferred together earnestly for some minutes. Finally the secretary said:

"In the circumstances we will give your wife a visa for the Hedjaz. That covers Jeddah and means that she can go to Mecca and Medina."

"Thank you," said Chale. "And what about me? You

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

must know that she cannot possibly undertake such a journey alone."

"We understand that perfectly, and therefore we will give you a visa for Jeddah. We can do no more than that. It will enable you to take your wife to Jeddah, and once you are there it will depend entirely on the authorities whether you are allowed to go to Mecca or not. I warn you that even apart from the King's order there is a prejudice against Europeans in Jeddah, even if they are Muslims. The Arabs there say they are trouble-makers. But if it is the will of God, you will go. Will that content you?"

"Thank you," said Chale. "It is said that it is wise to wear sandals until God sends one slippers. How much is there to pay?"

"Nothing," the secretary told him. "The Government of Saudi-Arabia is the only one in the world which does not charge travellers for a visa."

"Apparently it wouldn't make much out of European travellers if it did," suggested Chale.

The secretary met this pleasantry with a smile. He stamped the passports, and as he handed them to Chale I think there must have been a look of admiration in his eyes, for the Arab loves a good fighter, especially when he is fighting for his faith.

"When next we meet, Abdul Rahman," he said, courteously giving Chale his Muslim name, "I trust I may be able to call you Haji. We have a saying 'when a camel wants its ration it raises its head,' and if you do not reach Mecca it will not be for want of trying. Peace be upon your going."

"And upon you be peace," murmured Chale politely, shaking his hand.

VISA FOR JEDDAH

He left the Legation with the passports in his pocket and rather mixed emotions in his heart. He was disappointed not to have secured the visa that would take him to Mecca, but immeasurably relieved that—thanks to Munirah—he had not failed utterly. At least he could land with her at Jeddah. But the interview had brought home to him the full difficulties that lay ahead before he would be permitted to reach Mecca, and to Mecca he was determined to go.

That determination was strengthened by a letter he found Munirah reading when he arrived home. It was from her father, and its concluding sentence ran :

“The whole of Sarawak knows of your intention of performing the Haj with Abdul Rahman. If you fail it would be better for you to kill yourselves than to return to Sarawak, for the shame upon us all would be more than could be endured.”

Chapter VIII

THE PILGRIM SHIP

THE visas secured, Chale had nothing to keep him in London. He was anxious to reach Jeddah as soon as possible, for he did not know how long he might have to wait there before he obtained permission to go on the pilgrimage, which takes place only once a year. If all went well he would have six weeks in Mecca before the actual date of the Haj. That would not be too long.

They flew to Paris, took the train to Brindisi, and then flew on to Alexandria. Since they had entry visas for Egypt they had no trouble with the passport officials, and went on by train to Cairo, where they stayed at a Muslim hotel. Chale bought a fez, and a complete outfit of what he believed to be Arab clothes to wear when he reached Jeddah; but he discovered later that he had had an Egyptian Bedouin costume palmed off on him, and never wore it.

He learned that there was an Egyptian pilgrim ship (with European officers) sailing from Suez in a few days, so they went by the electric train to Suez and booked passages in her. Chale saw the Arab Consul and satisfied him that they had been vaccinated and inoculated against cholera. The Consul gave him a book of instructions on the procedure of the Haj, printed in Arabic. A number of officials scrutinized their passports, but found them in order. All seemed to be going well. With great relief they embarked in the *Talodi*, Chale wearing his fez for the first time.

THE PILGRIM SHIP

They found an extraordinary collection of passengers on board: Turks, Syrians, Moroccans, Africans, but only a few Egyptians, who, living nearest to Arabia, are the last to leave. They came from every class, poor and rich, simple and sophisticated, humble and well-born, some wearing clothes whose fashion had not changed since the days of Mohammed, others in European suits and felt hats. Every minute more came streaming up the gangway: mothers carrying babies in their arms or strapped to their backs, men and women so old that they could scarcely walk on board, some clad in rags, young people with the stamp of European culture, children who carried themselves with the confidence of their parents, healthy people and dying people, the halt and the blind. Never had Chale seen so strange a procession. Yet all had one thing in common: every face, smooth or wrinkled, was transfigured by an expression of calm happiness. It was the first time he had seen the profound influence of the pilgrimage upon a concourse of Muslims of many races. The joyful eagerness upon those faces seemed to bind the oddly assorted company into a lovely unity which comes only to those who follow an ideal that is pure and selfless. Poor and ragged, modernized and well-to-do, all now stood upon a common level, without distinction of caste or race; all were pilgrims to the Mother of Cities, and they were exalted by the thought that in a few days God in his goodness would allow them to behold Ancient Arabia, the country of his Prophet, the Holy Land of Islam.

No cabins were provided for the third-class passengers, and Chale watched the poorer pilgrims hurrying with their bundles to the forward deck, where they staked out claims

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

by spreading their mats or mattresses and erecting flimsy cloth screens for the protection of their womenfolk. One had a dried fish strapped to his arm, another a tin of blacking suspended round his neck. Mattresses were mixed up with crates of fowls and ducks. They produced their cooking-pots and unpacked their baskets of vegetables, fish, tea, and other luxuries. The ship would provide an allowance of cooked rice twice a day, and hot water would be available on demand.

Looking down from the upper deck, Chale was astonished at the tolerance of them all. They were packed as close as dates in a box, yet there was no jostling, no argument, no ill will. Their hearts were uplifted, their spiritual serenity rendered material discomfort of no account. They expected discomfort, welcomed it. They believed that it was ordered by God as part of the process of ridding them of their sins. If everything were made easy it would detract from the value of their great undertaking: that was why Chale heard, either then or afterwards, no word of complaint from any man or woman on board the pilgrim ship.

While he was watching the scene the *Talodi* left the quay, and anchored in mid-stream to wait for a party of fifty Afghans who had just entered the town. Having little money, they had walked to Suez from their mountains, and had been two years on the way. Chale watched them come aboard. They looked as hard as flint. They were lean and bearded, with fierce eyes, all heavily armed, the toughest set of men he had ever seen. They formed up on board, then marched in a body to the first-class deck, where they spread their mats.

An officer appeared, and urged them to go below. The

THE PILGRIM SHIP

Afghans said nothing, but did not move. They merely watched him with their piercing eyes, quietly truculent. He took himself off and returned with the captain, who tried shouting at them. As though oblivious of his presence the Afghans prostrated themselves on the deck and began to pray. The captain marched off in fury, and sent an enormous negro to tell them that if they did not go of their own accord they would be moved by force. The Afghans took all the deck-chairs they could find and made themselves comfortable for the night. The captain then had the firehose turned on them. The Afghans seized the hose and broke it. They intimated that if they were not left in peace there would be trouble. The incensed captain, not wishing to waste time by putting back to port, had to accept the situation. The Afghans resumed their deck-chairs.

Apart from this incident life proceeded quietly aboard the *Talodi*, and all the pilgrims showed Chale and Munirah the utmost friendliness. Travelling with them in the first class were several directors of the Bank of Egypt who were on a mission to King Ibn Saud; they hoped to persuade him to allow the Bank to open a branch in Saudi-Arabia. They were intelligent, cultivated men, and Munirah got on with them famously. As Chale put it, she had them as cold as mutton, although a few weeks previously she would have hardly dared to open her mouth in their presence.

They also met Hamdi Bey, equerry to the King's son, Feisal, the Emir of Mecca. He was a Turk, one of those who had fought against Lawrence, and was bringing his mother back from Istanbul. Chale made a point of making friends with him, thinking that he might be

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

useful, but Hamdi, although agreeable, did not appear sanguine about Chale's reaching Mecca.

"You do not realize the difficulties you will find," he said.

What those difficulties would be he did not disclose. Chale did not press him, knowing by this time that no Muslim would take the responsibility of turning a pilgrim back.

He did not confine his contacts to the first-class passengers, however. He went among the poorer pilgrims and talked to as many as he could. Some whiled away the time by chanting the Koran; others read or argued amiably on religious subjects. The society of those who had been to Mecca was much sought after, every one wanting to learn as much as he could about customs and procedure. When the sea became rough they huddled together in little groups, suffering in silence.

On the second day at sea the news spread round the ship that an aged Syrian pilgrim had died. Chale went to see what he could do, but there was no weeping or even any show of outward grief.

"God is greatest," said the old man's son. "He has called my father to his mercy. Let us perform the last rites."

That was all. The captain supplied the shroud, the rose-water, and the other things needful for a Muslim burial. The last prayers were said, and the body was committed to the sea. Even then there was no wailing. It was not indifference: only refusal to regret or to complain of God's will. Did not the Holy Koran say, "The Angel of Death shall take you away, he who is given in charge of you; then unto your Lord shall ye be returned." And had not

THE PILGRIM SHIP

God promised that those who believed and acted aright should dwell eternally in the gardens of Paradise, through which rivers flow?

Throughout the voyage the ship's officers were reserved and courteous, taking care not to interfere with the pilgrims' freedom, although it was clear to Chale that none of them greatly cared for this special pilgrim passage, least of all the Scots captain. His opinion of Muslims had never, apparently, been high, and the sight of the Afghan contingent camping on his upper deck did nothing to improve it. But he eyed Chale with more disapproval than the rest.

"Now, will ye tell me this, Mr Chale," he said one day.
"What's the use of becoming a Muslim?"

"If it comes to that," said Chale, "what's the use of becoming a Presbyterian?"

The muezzin's call to prayer put an end to what might have become an acrimonious theological discussion.

Five times a day the muezzin, appointed by the pilgrims, summoned them to prayer in the words of the azan. They hurried aft, spread their praying-carpets, and turned towards Mecca for their devotions. Then a curious silence would fall over the ship. Even the officers would creep about like mice. In all the ship there was no sound but the steady chug-chug of the engines, the voice of the Imam, and the responses of the worshippers as their bodies rose and fell in prostration.

Some of the Egyptians, particularly those who had been in England or the United States and wore felt hats, held aloof from these daily prayers at first. But as the ship approached Jeddah their attitude changed. Even the most sceptical were affected as they drew near the Holy Land,

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

and they joined in worship with their fellows. A subdued excitement began to pervade the ship, a religious fervour which daily grew more intense. Chale heard the first shouts of "Labayyk Allahumma labayyk"—"Here am I, O God, here am I," and many pilgrims, who intended to go straight to Mecca when they landed, discarded their ordinary clothes and put on the ihram, the two seamless towels which are invariably worn by men and women alike at certain times while on the Haj.

Some of the pilgrims prefer to pay their visit to the tomb of Mohammed before going to Mecca, and for their convenience the ship put into Yanbu, the port of Medina. Here the Afghans proclaimed their intention of leaving the ship and walking to Medina; thence they would go overland to Mecca. The captain was only too glad to see the last of them, but when they had landed the Emir of Yanbu gave orders that they were to return to the ship, since it was the custom for pilgrims to go to Medina by camel or by motor-car. He warned them that it was against their own interests to go on foot. There were bears and tigers in the mountains, and many of them would be killed. The Afghans declared that they were a match for any bears and tigers. Arabia was not the Emir's land, or even the King's land. It was the Holy Land. They had as much right to do as they wished in it as he. They had decided to walk, and they would walk. They set off, each man carrying his few belongings and a little flour which he mixed with water to make pancakes.

That was the last Chale saw of them, as they swung along the dusty road towards Medina. He watched them go with admiration. They were men after his own heart: resolute, prepared to face every hardship to achieve their

THE PILGRIM SHIP

end. He wondered if he would meet them again in Mecca.

Later he heard their story. The Emir of Yanbu had sent word to King Ibn Saud to tell him what had happened. The King despatched an Arab chieftain and four police after the Afghans to turn them back. The Afghans unsheathed their knives and killed the chief. The police bolted. The Afghans marched on towards Medina, leaving the body of the chief sprawling across the road.

When the King heard the news he sent out a hundred negro slaves, gigantic men, mostly from Abyssinia, armed with swords. They pursued the Afghans along the road, rounded them up, and beat them back to Yanbu, and thence for four hundred miles to Jeddah. It would have been death to the Afghans to resist. They went along the road docilely enough, scourged by the negroes, crying out that they were being deservedly punished for their sins. On reaching Jeddah they were put into prison, and were not allowed to go upon the Haj that year.

From Yanbu to Jeddah is twenty-four hours' steam. When the *Talodi* sailed the Meccans on board advised Chale to name a sheikh who would look after his affairs and help him to reach Mecca, but he still declined to commit himself. He had come to realize how essential it was that he should find a sheikh who had personal influence with the King, otherwise there seemed every likelihood of his papers being filed away, so that he might never reach Mecca at all, and he was well aware that once he had named a sheikh it would be difficult to make a change. He determined to wait until he got ashore.

As they approached Jeddah the excitement became intense. The pilgrims crowded to the ship's side, waiting to

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

catch their first glimpse of the ancient city, and when it came in sight they began shouting, "Labayyk Allahumma labayyk!"

Chale stood on the upper deck, Munirah by his side. She was tranquil, silent, yet he knew that her heart must be as stirred as his. Far away across the bright green water, its waves tipped with gold by the blazing sun, he could see the minarets of the mosques rising like great white candles above the flat-roofed buildings of the Arab city, which stood mellow and saffron under the cloudless sky. Beyond rose a range of barren mountains, in whose valley the Mother of Cities lay hidden from sight.

The ship picked her way circumspectly through the natural guardians of the port, the coral reefs, which Chale could plainly see under the pellucid water, sunken coral islands covered with a forest of yellow and violet sea-plants, swaying like trees in a wind; tiny fishes flitted through them, radiant as birds. The *Talodi* dropped her anchor a mile from the shore, near the hulk of a pilgrim ship which had been burned out and had run aground two years before. Chale had heard how, heedless of warnings, the pilgrims had lighted their cooking-fires in the hold, and when the ship was ablaze had refused to leave her. Hundreds had lost their lives, sustained by the belief that God had willed them to perish so, within sight of the Holy Land.

As Chale watched the scene the sea suddenly became full of movement. A fleet of Arab dhows, with brick-red sails, came bearing down upon the ship to take the pilgrims ashore. As they drew near the pilgrims left the side and ran to grab their bundles and make their final preparations. As they sped chattering to and fro Chale still

THE PILGRIM SHIP

heard no word of altercation from that crowded deck: only the cry of "Labayyk Allahumma labayyk" rising again and again above the clamour of many tongues.

A fast motor-boat outdistanced the dhows and drew alongside the sea-gangway which had been let down. Six Arab police, armed with long swords encased in ornamented silver sheaths, stepped out, followed by a man dressed in the costume of Arabia, a long flowing mishlah, the gold-embroidered robe of woven camel's hair which conceals the white cotton shirt and trousers worn beneath it, and a white head-covering of plain cashmere, draped over the head to shelter the nape of the neck from the sun and kept in place by the rope-like igal of black camel's hair. This was the port doctor, a Syrian, fair-skinned and big-boned, courteous and smiling.

Having inspected the ship's bill of health, he examined the pilgrims' visas intently with a pocket magnifying-glass, and satisfied himself that every one had been recently vaccinated and inoculated. Then he left the ship, the police remaining at the head of the gangway.

The dhows were now allowed to approach. Their Arab and African crews battled and manœuvred to be the first alongside. There were no sheikhs or agents aboard them, so that any danger of pilgrim-stealing was precluded, but the din and turmoil became deafening as the pilgrims began to disembark and the dhows' crews competed for their custom.

Chale had just decided to let the main body go first, when Hamdi Bey came up and offered them a passage in his launch, which was coming off from the shore. Chale accepted gladly, touched by the Turk's thoughtfulness. As he and Munirah went down the gangway the pilgrims still

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

aboard and those in the dhows near by shouted their good wishes and offered their services when ashore.

Chale parted from Hamdi Bey on the wharf. He was a conspicuous figure in his tussore suit and Egyptian fez, and as he passed into the ramshackle police office he found himself surrounded by a crowd of sheikhs' agents, who called upon him to name his sheikh. He replied that he was still considering the matter and would name no one yet. The badals were shocked at this breach of etiquette. They cried that it was the custom for a pilgrim to name a sheikh the moment he landed. No one might leave the wharf until he had named his sheikh. Wallah, no one might dare to flout the examination of pilgrims established by centuries of custom. Chale still refused. Where did he come from? they demanded. Sarawak. A yell went up from the badals of the East Indian sheikhs. He was their property, then. He must name an East Indian sheikh. Then all his troubles would be over. Chale countered by saying that Hamdi Bey had promised to find him a sheikh. A howl of rage answered him. Hamdi Bey had no power to interfere. He would be executed if he dared to interfere. Still Chale was adamant. He had heard of the sheikh to whom Sarawak pilgrims were accustomed to entrust their affairs, although he could not remember the man's name, but since he was half Malay and not pure Arab Chale doubted if he would have enough influence to get them to Mecca. He still refused, and while the badals were wrangling round him he took Munirah's arm and thrust their way through the crowd to a man who appeared to be in charge of the Customs.

This was a sinister-looking fellow, a Syrian, with black whiskers, one eye, two daggers, and a long sword. He wore

THE PILGRIM SHIP

a shabby khaki uniform buttoned up to the neck: probably an old German one, Chale thought. On his head was the usual white cloth and a black igal. He appeared to have very little authority; or it may have been that he did not care to exercise it. At all events he made no effort to interfere while Chale was being bullied by the badals of the sheikhs, and surveyed the scene indifferently with his solitary eye.

In due course Chale was allowed to pass into the broken-down Customs shed, where hundreds of pilgrims who had come ashore were assembled. The place was in a turmoil. There was no system. The scene was fantastic. No one seemed to know what the duties were. The one-eyed Syrian's underlings would shout out a sum, and then double it or halve it without compunction. Pilgrims were staggering about with their bundles under their arms or on their shoulders, now opening them for inspection, now stuffing them together. Occasionally one of them would pick up his belongings, load them on a donkey-cart, and make off, only to be bawled at by the Arab Customs inspectors and have to come rushing back.

After Singapore and Alexandria the system appeared to Chale to be chaotic. But one of the inspectors, when appealed to, bestirred himself to look at their baggage. The badals swooped down again, like crows about a scarecrow. Chale saw one face he disliked less than the rest. He signed to the man, and whispered to him to get their baggage through. Instantly half a dozen ragged porters seized it and lugged it outside the Customs shed. The one-eyed Syrian directed Chale to repair to the police-court in an hour.

Chale discovered that the man he had selected was

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Jamil, son of the chief badal in Jeddah. Could Jamil tell him the best sheikh to name? No, he would be cursed by the other badals if he were to give a pilgrim such advice.

"Then who is the Sarawak sheikh?"

"I dare not tell you. But I wish to be your friend. You would not be well advised to name him. He has little influence in Mecca. He is half Malay."

"Then show me some place where we can stay," said Chale.

Jamil escorted them and their baggage to an Arab hotel, a lofty building of sandstone, many stories high, the pride of Arabia. The place seemed to be infested with a swarm of small Bedouin boys. Chale and Munirah were shown to a room on the fifth floor in which there was an old black iron bedstead, daubed with silver paint. Over it hung a pink mosquito-net with elaborate lace flounces. There were two rickety bentwood chairs and a tiny enamel wash-basin which had probably been imported from England fifty years previously. In an anteroom was a rough wooden table with two more chairs. Leading out of the bedroom was an Arab bathroom with a water-jar and a tin dipper, and a closet hole in one corner which had nothing between it and the bare earth a hundred feet below.

It was not the kind of accommodation Chale would have chosen for preference, but he was in no mood to be discouraged. He tipped Jamil and called for food. Some rice and dates were brought up to the anteroom, and when they had eaten they made their way to the police-court, which they discovered high up on the main wall of the city.

There they found the one-eyed Syrian. Freed from the embarrassment of the other pilgrims, he now had leisure

THE PILGRIM SHIP

to enjoy himself by probing into Chale's affairs, assisted by a number of badals who clustered round and aided the interrogation by rattling out any questions he had not had time to think of himself.

First he re-examined their passports with an enormous magnifying-glass, holding them close to his eye. He handed them back, and gave Chale the cheerful tidings that his visa was now useless. It had been valid for landing, but would not justify his remaining in Jeddah, or even help him to leave.

He then asked Chale why he had become a Muslim, and how he earned his living, writing down the answers on long strips of paper, with his eye no more than an inch from the top of his nib. Chale satisfied his curiosity to the best of his ability. What papers had he to show that he was a Muslim? Once again Chale produced Mr Khalil Anwari's certificate. One-eye examined it with great suspicion, the badals craning their necks over his shoulder. Then he asked the question Chale had been dreading :

“ How long have you been a Muslim? ”

By this time Chale's wits had been sharpened by vicissitude. He had no desire to lie, particularly on a matter which concerned his faith. On the other hand he knew that if he answered “ Six weeks,” as he had at the Legation, he stood little chance of being allowed to go to Mecca. But this time he had his answer ready. He felt justified in giving it, for it was the literal truth, and he reasoned that if it smacked of sophistry God would absolve his sin on the Plain of Arafat.

“ My heart has been Muslim for six years,” he said.

Watching anxiously to gauge the effect of this statement, he was relieved to observe that One-eye appeared to

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

be appeased. But he explained that he had no authority to deal with the case. All the papers must be sent to the Chief of Police, who would pass them to the Emir of Jeddah, who in turn would forward them to Mecca for inspection. How long would that take? A shrug indicated that he could not tell, and did not greatly care.

Chale now realized that if his papers were to be dealt with in time for him to go on the Haj he must name a sheikh without delay. He had no wish to apply for help to the British Minister in Jeddah. His experience in Singapore had taught him to steer clear of British officials. During the inquiry he had seen a badal whose manner and appearance had impressed him favourably. While One-eye was poring over the documents he had had an opportunity to question this man, and found that his name was Mohammed Saleh, son of Mustapha Babli, the agent of Abdul Rahman Getan, who Chale had heard was one of the most powerful sheiks of Mecca.

"Have you yet named a sheikh?" demanded One-eye, when he had collected as many documents as Chale could give him.

"Not yet. But now I name Abdul Rahman Getan," said Chale in a loud voice.

"God be with you," said One-eye, to indicate that the interview was at an end.

Chale and Munirah left the police-station with Mohammed Saleh, who assured them that he, his father, and Sheikh Abdul Rahman Getan would do all in their power to get his papers through quickly and to assist him in every way as long as he remained in the Hedjaz. That, added Saleh, went for Munirah too.

They returned to the hotel, and sat in their room with

THE PILGRIM SHIP

Saleh, discussing ways and means. Chale was feeling more optimistic than he had felt for weeks. Obviously there was to be a plague of bureaucratic jobbery before his papers went through, but Saleh's reassuring conversation led him to suppose that they would not be long. All police officials were the same, said Saleh; they were nobodies, but they liked to show their importance; they had empty bellies, yet they chewed incense.

Chale agreed with him. He was beginning to like Saleh. He thanked his stars that he had not been precipitate in his choice.

Suddenly there was a clatter outside. The door was flung open and six soldiers marched into the room. They were dressed in khaki tunics and jhodpurs, with pistols in their belts and a long stick and rifle with a fixed bayonet in either hand. They grounded their rifles on the floor. One of them, whom Chale took to be a non-commissioned officer, announced in Arabic that he had a message from the Chief of Police.

"Speak," said Chale, optimism ebbing from him like a tide.

"The Chief of Police wishes to tell you that you may have to stay in Jeddah a long time. It may be ten days, ten months, or ten years."

"Al-hamdu-lillah," replied Chale equably. "God's will be done."

The soldiers slumped their rifles and clumped out.

Chapter IX

J E D D A H

NEXT morning Jamil, the son of the chief badal of Jeddah, paid them a visit to inquire which sheikh Chale had named, since it was his duty to keep a record. There was also, said he, a small sum to be paid as dues for Zem-Zem water from the holy well of Mecca.

Chale offered him an Egyptian bank-note, but found that it was not legal tender. He had been expecting this, for he knew that the currency of Arabia was the English gold sovereign, which he could not obtain in Egypt. He might have obtained a supply in London, but he could not have carried it with him on his journey, and so in Cairo he had drawn on a letter of credit for five hundred pounds in Egyptian notes. These he had been compelled to bring with him to Arabia, where there are no banks, since usury and placing money at interest is forbidden by the Koran. Banks are, for Muslims, illegal institutions, which economic conditions have forced them to accept, but King Ibn Saud adheres strictly to the injunctions of the Prophet, and Chale learned later that the directors of the Bank of Egypt with whom he had travelled had returned without having secured their object of opening a branch in Arabia.

In the Arabs' insistence on the currency of Arabia being the English gold pound Chale saw evidence of far-sighted sagacity. Before the country attained independence Turkish notes had been in use; after the War they

JEDDAH

had become worthless, and the Arabs learned their lesson. Lawrence had brought English gold into the country, and when Hussein became king of Saudi-Arabia he adopted it as the country's currency. There is also a silver currency of Arab reals and smaller coins, which fluctuates between thirty reals to the gold pound during the hot season and fifteen during the height of the pilgrimage.

The British Government allows a certain amount of gold to be imported into Arabia, knowing that it is impossible to lose thereby, owing to the peculiar economic situation of Saudi-Arabia, which has to import annually twenty or thirty million pounds' worth of goods to provide for the requirements of the inhabitants themselves and the thousands of transient pilgrims. Saudi-Arabia exports nothing with which to pay for those imports, and therefore depends upon the money brought in by pilgrims. This is changed into sovereigns, with which the imports are paid for, so that the gold is kept in continual circulation.

Jamil advised Chale to change his Egyptian money into English sovereigns, and to buy reals as he needed them. He agreed, and they set off together to the market.

The morning was fine and full of sunshine, the heat as moderate as in an English June. They passed along the waterfront, where hundreds of dhows were tied to posts fixed in the sandy beach. Some were putting out to sea, and the sailors were singing a kind of chanty as they hauled up the sails, one leading them in a nasal chant, the others droning a refrain, calling upon God to send them a fair wind.

The narrow streets were packed with men and animals: camels striding sulkily or groaning, with tears pouring

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

from their eyes, as they knelt for their loads; donkeys and goats wandering unintended in the dark alleys, the goats stopping to munch any sustenance they could find, devouring paper and cigarette-ends. The unpaved ways were shadowed by the tall sandstone houses on either side, but here and there was an expanse of sunlight which blazed down upon a tiny wilderness of stones and bricks, all that remained of a house which had been pulled down and left until more prosperous times should come.

The only scavengers were the paupers, who collected rubbish and scraps from the Arab houses, mouldy bread and offal, which they carried off to their huts in the African settlement outside the city wall, inhabited mainly by Abyssinians and Yemenites. Jamil told Chale that in Hussein's time the settlement had been the resort of prostitutes, but Ibn Saud had ordered them to provide themselves with husbands and to live in seclusion as became Muslim women, whether poor or rich.

Chale found that the bazaar was not an open market-place but a maze of roofed streets where the vendors sat on benches with their wares spread out on stalls. Here, on Jamil's advice, Chale bought a black leather belt, fitted with small pockets for money, such as every pilgrim wore. He found the money-changers sitting in the midst of a seething mass of people, each with an iron safe, which he left in its place at night. They were doing a brisk business with the pilgrims from the *Talodi*, and Chale observed that they were able to quote the exchange for any currency without consulting tables. He changed nearly all his Egyptian notes into English sovereigns and stuffed them into the pockets of his belt.

Having settled with Jamil, he returned to the hotel,

JEDDAH

where he found Mohammed Saleh waiting for him. With Saleh was his father, Mustapha Babli, a fine type of Arab, who had been in the pilgrim agency all his life: the business had been in the family for three generations. His connexion was mainly with the Sundanese of Central Java. Saleh had been sent out to Java once (as Chale heard later) to work up a new branch, but had disappointed his father, for, having spent all his money on his own amusement, he had returned to Jeddah without either cash, credit, or pilgrims, and announced that he had married a couple of Sundanese wives. That lapse had been years ago, however, and now Saleh was his father's right-hand man, energetic and resourceful.

Mustapha Babli told Chale not to be downcast at the message he had received from the Chief of Police on the previous evening.

"The plough bites deep only where the soil is soft, brother," he said reassuringly, "and we Arabs have a saying, 'If a serpent love thee, wear it as a necklace.' Difficulties there may be, but my son and I shall overcome them, if God wills."

Chale asked when he would see Sheikh Abdul Rahman Getan. He was in Mecca, said Mustapha Babli. Doubtless he would come to Jeddah soon. Meanwhile there was an important question to be asked.

"Have you been circumcised, brother?" he inquired. "No? Then it would be well to have the operation performed without delay."

Chale agreed. He explained that he had thought it prudent to wait until he reached the Hedjaz, so that then there could be no doubt of his good faith.

He accompanied Saleh and Mustapha Babli to a house

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

near by, and was introduced to an Arab circumciser. Having recited the customary prayer, the Arab told Chale to soak his penis in cold water until it became numb. He performed the actual operation adroitly with a sharp flint, then cut off the top of an egg, into which he thrust the wounded organ and secured it with a bandage, telling Chale not to abandon the egg for three days.

Circumcision is not ordered by the Koran, but is part of the ancient law of Abraham which Mohammed accepted. In a land where water is scarce it is part of the principle of bodily cleanliness, and is a definite requirement of Muslim religious practice. Chale had not been looking forward to the operation, which he might have had painlessly performed in a London nursing-home. But that would not have been his way. He wanted no easy subterfuge, and to him it seemed proper that the ancient rite should be performed under conditions such as every Muslim boy had to undergo. For him, as a grown man, it would be more painful; that could not be helped. But when the time came his concentration on his purpose was so intense that it enabled him to bear the pain without flinching; his mind mastered physical wounds as it had mastered sexual desire, and he preferred to go about his business calmly in the days that followed, rather than lie up, since he felt it essential that no one in Jeddah besides the surgeon and the two badals should know that he was but newly circumcised.

On the way back to the hotel he complained to Saleh and Mustapha Babli that he had the sensation of being spied upon day and night. It was the one thing he could not stand. Even the little Bedouin boys would peep into

JEDDAH

his room to see if he and Munirah were praying at the appointed times. He had had only twenty-four hours of it, but already it was getting on his nerves.

Without the slightest hesitation both father and son insisted that he must have the hospitality of their roof. There would be no charge whatever, they explained: he must stay with them until he obtained permission to go to Mecca. Chale gladly accepted. Saleh told him that he must notify his change of abode to the police, and so they made their way to the office of the one-eyed Syrian, who greeted Chale warmly, but warned him that until his papers came through he might not leave the house unless accompanied by Saleh and on no account might he go outside the walls of Jeddah.

Chale realized that this meant that for all intents and purposes he was a prisoner; but apostle of freedom though he was, he accepted the situation with a good grace. There was, indeed, nothing else to do, and much as he disliked having his freedom of action impeded, he knew his position would become infinitely worse if he remained in the hotel. Moreover, he welcomed the opportunity of obtaining an insight into Arab life.

So he collected Munirah and his baggage, and moved to Mustapha Babli's house, which was in the centre of the city: an old stone building, five stories high, with an immense wooden doorway. Outside were two long seats of string on a wooden framework, on which the family and any pilgrims sojourning with them could sit and gossip and drink tea from little glasses.

The ground floor, on the street level, was of beaten earth, divided into a number of small rooms which were at the disposal of Getan's pilgrims during their stay in

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Jeddah; they provided their own food and sleeping-mats, and had to buy their water.

The rest of the house was divided like a block of flats. Saleh's quarters were on the first floor, and consisted of a spacious room spread with beautiful Meccan carpets. Along the walls was a continuous settee, with many cushions. On one side, jutting out over the street and on a level with the settee, was a large alcove, with latticed windows; here the men spread their sleeping-mats at night. There was no furniture in the room but a few small tables, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and a number of mirrors on the walls. Beyond this room was a smaller one for the women, with latticed windows through which they could look out upon the street without being seen, and a kitchen.

The next floor was occupied by Mustapha Babli's second wife, a young woman he had recently married. The unmarried children of his first wife (Saleh's mother) had the third floor, while the old lady herself, who owned large properties in her own right, had the fourth floor to herself. On the fifth floor were a number of rooms, more open and cooler than the rest, where the whole household slept in the summer. Chale estimated that there were between thirty to forty people in the house.

Munirah was accommodated in the women's quarters on Saleh's floor, although she afterwards came to spend much of her time with Mustapha Babli's younger wife, while Chale lived in Saleh's quarters. Saleh had three slaves, one man and two women, all of negroid extraction, but, of course, Muslims. They lived as members of the family, performing menial tasks; but Saleh's wife did the cooking, and at meal-times it was Saleh, not one of the

JEDDAH

slaves, who brought it in from the kitchen; his wife could not appear in Chale's presence. They lived simply, mostly on rice, mutton, and dates, and occasionally fish, drinking a little sweetened tea, shahi, after the meal, and coffee at all hours of the day. Water in Jeddah was formerly scarce and expensive, but Chale learned that an English engineer had installed a plant for condensing sea-water, and every morning he would hear the cry of "Condenser! Condenser!" as the hawkers went through the streets selling water in kerosene-oil tins at three indis—approximately twopence—a tin.

Had it not been for his anxiety about the future, Chale would have found life in Jeddah agreeable enough, at all events for a time, while all was strange and new to him: his temperament and habit of life were too active for him to have tolerated it willingly for long.

Normally the life of the average Arab is serene and tranquil. His day is made up of little things. He has no particular ambition; few interests beyond his religion, his women, and his food. At dawn he is awakened by the call to prayer. Chale found this very lovely. Every morning he would hear the muezzin of the leading mosque utter the azan, ending: "'Tis better to pray than to sleep, 'tis better to pray than to sleep." One by one, each of the thirty-four mosques of Jeddah would take up the call. Then silence, followed by a strange rustling and murmuring sound throughout the city as the followers of the Prophet performed their ablutions and recited the daylight prayer. An Arab who does not leave the house may, if feeling lazy, go back to bed again, while the women and slaves prepare a light meal and tea; and after breakfast he may stroll to the market, or watch a pilgrim ship

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

come in, waiting for the midday prayer, sometimes going to the mosque to recite it. After the midday meal he usually goes to sleep, waking in time for the third prayer at four-thirty. Then tea, and perhaps a smoke and a stroll to the nearest coffee-shop for a chat with friends. He returns to the house for the sunset prayer, and afterwards sits outside on the string benches gossiping until the last prayer of the day, at seven-thirty. Then comes the evening meal, after which he may recite the Koran for half an hour, and then to bed.

Every Friday, just before the muezzin makes his call to prayer, the Wahabbi police go round the streets of Jeddah bawling out "Salat-al-Juma"—"Friday prayers!" Whereupon all the streets and shops become entirely deserted as every one in the city repairs to the mosques to pray. Not a soul is to be seen abroad. Shops stand open, stalls in the market are left unguarded, without fear of theft or molestation.

Jeddah has no modern amenities. There are no cinemas, no cabarets, and no band instrument may be played, by order of the King. Between the arrival of the pilgrim ships there is nothing for the Arab to do but pray, eat, sleep, and gossip (mainly about women) in the coffee-shops or on the benches outside the houses. Not a very exciting life for a big strong man, Chale thought, but he saw that Saleh and his circle, having known no other, were more content than most Europeans, and, as old Mustapha Babli once observed to him, contentment is a treasure which is inexhaustible, for those who are content with what God has given them are the richest of men.

Chale found that the Arabs' chief source of content were their women, who were their only recreation. It did

JEDDAH

not take him long to discover that Arab men regard sex quite differently from Europeans. They discuss it openly. It forms indeed the usual topic of conversation, but without prurience or salaciousness. Their sexual potency is a matter of supreme importance to them. They drink quantities of camel's milk, whose oily fat they believe to have aphrodisiac properties, and spend large sums in consulting experts in brewing strengthening potions designed to ensure the sexual vigour demanded by male honour and feminine insistence. They are extremely uxorious and ready for an encounter at any hour of the day. Saleh told Chale that it was quite usual for an emir to clap his hands suddenly while giving an audience and tell a slave to prepare the women of his harem. He would then leave the hall, select one of his wives, and return later to take up his affairs of state where he had left them.

Munirah found that her life was far more restricted than it had been in Sarawak. There at least she could go out when she wanted to; but the Arab women never left the house except to visit close relatives in times of sickness, birth, or death. They seldom breathed fresh air, for they were not allowed in the mosques and even had to pray indoors, and although they might wear pretty clothes, when they did go out, they had to wear over them a gunaha, a black garment which covered them from head to foot, so that when seen in the street it was impossible to tell whether they were young girls or aged hags. Chale could not enter the women's quarters, and the only time Munirah could see him was in Saleh's room, when every one else was out.

He learned from Munirah that the Arab girls were very beautiful: in her opinion, much lovelier than the Malays.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Their skins were light, from being constantly indoors, their eyes coal-black, their mouths sensuous, and they were tall and slender, with perfect figures. All this Chale had to take on trust, for while he was staying with Saleh he never saw a woman unveiled but once, when he returned to the house unexpectedly and found Saleh's wife, Ayesha, sweeping out the large room. Munirah, who was with her, had given her a biscuit from a tin Chale had bought, and Ayesha had unveiled to eat it. When Chale marched in she screamed, flung her dress over her head, and rushed from the room in consternation, and Chale, much embarrassed, had to explain the situation to Saleh when he returned.

As the days went by and Chale had no news about his papers he began to grow more and more anxious. He knew enough of the ways of bureaucracy to realize that the process of sending official correspondence "through the usual channels" might take weeks. He determined to see the Emir of Jeddah in the hope of being able to speed matters up. Saleh, somewhat reluctantly, agreed to secure an interview for him.

By this time Chale had discarded his European suit and had taken to wearing the Arab mishlah, with the white head-covering and igel upon his head. Once he had become used to them he found the clothes comfortable enough; also they made him less conspicuous in the streets and protected him from the stares and suspicious glances of those he passed; and as by now he spoke Arabic with sufficient fluency, most people took him for a Syrian or a Turk. He had begun to cultivate the short Arab chin-beard. In these days it is not unusual for Arabs to be clean-shaven, but custom has decreed that a man's face

JEDDAH

must not be touched with a razor, and Ibn Saud and his Wahabbis adhere to the rule, so that clean-shaven Arabs find it politic to grow a beard before having an audience with the King.

Saleh accompanied him to the Emir's house, in front of which was a little shady garden, with pools, palms, giant ferns, and banana-trees; the only garden Chale had seen in the city. It was the Emir's special hobby. He was accustomed to sit there in the evenings, dealing with his correspondence.

After some delay Chale was shown into the Emir's office, which was thickly carpeted, with the usual cushioned bench extending along the walls. In one corner sat the Emir, inscrutable and serene. By his side was a clerk, tall, stern, cadaverous. The Emir greeted him courteously, invited him to be seated, and inquired his business.

Chale explained his case and asked if any letter had come from Mecca about him. The Emir professed ignorance, and turned to his clerk, who proceeded to look through a pile of letters, but so perfunctorily that Chale could see that he was only making a pretence. No, there was no letter.

"Then it will be necessary to wait," said the Emir.

"But how long?" asked Chale.

The Emir shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows?" he answered. "The carpet-seller does not keep his shop for a single customer, and the Emir of Mecca has much to do. He who is impatient to hear one word may have to listen to many."

His manner was not unfriendly, but Chale could see that he was an extremely astute man whom it would be impossible to jockey into a course he was disinclined to

take. He was suspicious, yet he was prepared to be fair. As a Muslim he would put no actual obstacles in Chale's path, but he was not disposed to make it easier. He asked Chale no questions about his nationality, but it was clear that he knew all about him. He explained that the King's orders made it difficult for a person who had been converted to Islam to reach Mecca until he had proved himself a genuine Muslim. Only recently, he said, there had been a Slav who had come to Jeddah professing to be a Muslim. He had been told that he must wait several years before he could be allowed to go to Mecca. But that man's mouth knew not the savour of patience, a cup from which only the strong might drink. He did not know that haste is the resort of the weak or that rashness is the mother of regrets. Like a bee, his mouth had honey in it, but in his tail was a sting. He plotted with another like himself and arranged for a motor-car to meet him on the road to Mecca. Then he slipped through the city gate in a disguise, and started off. But it was not God's will that he should succeed. His plan became known, his car was stopped. He was brought back to Jeddah and put into prison. Then the baseness of that man's heart became clear to all. He had torn his fez into pieces and flung them upon the ground, declaring that he would no longer hold to a faith which entailed such injustice and so many hardships.

"Every Muslim in Jeddah is glad," ended the Emir, with a keen look at Chale, "that the evil in that man's heart has now come out. It is now clear to all that he is but an infidel, and by the next ship he will return to the country whence he came."

Chale had no doubt that the Emir had told him this

JEDDAH

story as a warning. He remembered having seen the man strolling about in the bazaar, hatless, but apparently happy.

"Truly God prepares for the unrighteous a grievous woe," he said complacently. "Yet he will defend the true believer."

"His mercy is great," agreed the Emir gravely, indicating with a gesture that the interview was at an end.

Chale returned to Saleh's house even more despondent than he had left it. But two days later he was somewhat encouraged to find that Sheikh Abdul Rahman Getan had arrived from Mecca to see him.

Getan was an Arab of medium height, slightly lame, with large intelligent eyes. He had a moustache, but, Chale was surprised to see, no beard.

Chale saw that both Saleh and Mustapha Babli treated him with the utmost deference, kissing his hand in greeting, although he suspected that there was little love lost between them. By that time he had learned enough of the sheikh system to know that the Jeddah badals hated the Meccans like poison, and while they showed them homage to their faces they reviled them behind their backs. They lived in a state of perpetual dread of incurring the displeasure of their principals, because their livelihood depended entirely upon the sheikhs' goodwill. Most of the sheikhs were vacillating and suspicious, and on hearing a word of complaint from a pilgrim about his treatment in Jeddah they did not hesitate to put their business into the hands of another agent, without either inquiry or explanation.

That was the reason, Chale had discovered, why Saleh and Mustapha Babli had refused to take any payment

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

from him for board and lodging: although they were not averse to accepting a present of a sovereign or two. But to take payment for services rendered was an unpardonable offence, for which the Meccans were ever on the watch, being exceedingly jealous of their juma'ah and fearful that they should part with a real to anyone but themselves. Nor, Chale found, did the badals receive any payment from their sheikhs, save for a small sum in respect of each lodger. But they were entitled to a proportion of the Government dues which every pilgrim paid before leaving for Mecca, and during the prosperous years these commissions provided them with considerable incomes, since their expenses connected with the pilgrims were negligible. But in the lean years when, owing to the world economic depression, only a comparatively small number of pilgrims arrived, they were hard hit and had difficulty in meeting their expenses.

Chale soon found that Getan knew that he had not been a publicly proclaimed Muslim for six years and that he had only just been circumcised. But he encouraged Chale by making light of all difficulties, and assured him that he would do everything in his power to get him to Mecca. In this matter his professional reputation was at stake.

Rather dismally, Chale spoke of his abortive interview with the Emir of Jeddah.

"No matter," replied Getan. "Remember, not every genie will enter a glass bottle, and this matter is as delicate as laying fine linen upon thorns. But I have good news. Feisal, the Emir of Mecca, is coming to Jeddah to-day, and I have arranged for him to grant you an interview. He has a house outside the town, where he will stay. Go now with Saleh to the post-office and telephone to find

JEDDAH

out when he will receive you. Guard your tongue carefully when you speak to him, and, if God so wills it, all will be well. Once you obtain his permission, you need trouble about the Emir of Jeddah no further. If the moon be with you, you do not need the light of the stars."

Optimism blossomed once more in Chale's mercurial heart, and he went off to the post-office with Saleh. On the way they saw a Ford car slowly approaching in the narrow street. In it sat a magnificent figure dressed in a uniform of white silk resplendent with gold Turkish lace. It was Hamdi Bey, Feisal's equerry. He recognized Chale, stopped the car, got out, and greeted him. He knew about the promised audience, and offered to send his car to Saleh's house in half an hour.

Chale returned hastily to dress. Knowing how much the Arabs appreciate fine clothes, he determined to wear the best he had. He selected from his newly acquired wardrobe a gold embroidered mishlah, a headcloth of fine Karachi cotton, and a black igal with gold thread.

When the car arrived he set out, accompanied by Saleh. They passed unchallenged through the gate in the city wall, and drove through the village where the Africans lived. The road was rough and sandy, the plain stretching away on either side. On the left, beyond the village, were a number of conical huts occupied by the lunatics and lepers banished from the town.

The Emir of Mecca's palace was a modern building. The door was guarded by armed police. Saleh explained their business, and they were taken into a large room, hung with old Turkish candelabra. In a few minutes Hamdi Bey appeared and told Chale that the Emir would see him. Telling Saleh to wait, he took Chale by the hand

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

and led him along a passage, across a landing, and up a flight of stairs. Half-way up they were stopped by an immense negro, in Arab dress, armed with a pistol, a sword, and a dagger. Hamdi Bey whispered that he was one of the Emir's personal bodyguard, whose duty was to follow and watch every unknown person who was admitted to the Emir's presence. If any visitor made an unexpected move he would instantly be killed.

At a word from Hamdi Bey the negro let them pass on up the stairs, but followed with one hand on his pistol and the other on his sword. They entered a great hall, on either side of which a number of Arabs were sitting cross-legged. At the far end the Emir was seated upon a throne of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

Hamdi Bey led Chale across the hall and presented him. Chale held out his hand in the Arab greeting. The Emir indicated that he might be seated.

Chale felt at once that he was in the presence of no ordinary man. Emir Feisal had an air of dignity and natural command which Chale found immensely impressive. His skin was fairer than that of the average Arab; he was not bearded, but had a small moustache, and wore the usual Arab mishlah with an igal of solid gold. He sat on his throne in silent immobility, his body thrust slightly forward, a hand on either knee, regarding Chale intently, with dark eyes in which shone a superior intelligence. On his left, upon chairs of ebony and pearl, sat two Syrian councillors.

For three minutes they all sat there looking at each other. Nobody said a word. Chale was waiting for the Emir to open the audience. The Emir appeared to be waiting for nothing in particular. He merely sat there

JEDDAH

observing Chale with his dark eyes, in which appeared neither hostility nor constraint. At last Chale, in spite of his experience of Eastern ways, began to feel acutely uncomfortable. He had forgotten to inquire the procedure. Perhaps it was for him to begin. If so, he was making an idiot of himself by sitting dumb. The thought sent a further wave of embarrassment surging over him. He felt that even a breach of etiquette would be better than this awful silence.

"May I be permitted to speak, your Highness?" he inquired, hoping that if he had made a false step he would not attract the attention of the gigantic negro, who was squatting a few paces behind him.

"Say what you will," replied Feisal, keeping his eyes fixed on Chale's.

"I have travelled to Jeddah from a far country with the intention of making the pilgrimage to the Holy Cities," Chale said. "For six years my heart has been that of a Muslim. It has been my endeavour to follow faithfully the teaching of the Prophet (on whom be peace). My ardent desire to reach Jeddah has been attained, at great expense. I now ask your Highness to grant my request to proceed to Mecca that I may conform with the fifth pillar of Islam and be forgiven my sins."

"Your request is proper and reasonable," replied the Emir. "I will do my best to help you. When I receive your papers I will forward them to my father, the King, who, as you know, lives at Riadth in Nejd. No one who has embraced Islam as a convert may go to Mecca without a permit granted under his personal seal. Such is the custom of the Hedjaz, for the Koran, which is its law, says that all care must be taken to prevent those whose hearts

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

are not truly Muslim from entering the Holy Land. You must therefore abide in patience, and comply with the custom and the law until the King makes known his will."

To this speech Chale made no reply. He could see that he was not expected to; and indeed if he had been, there was nothing he could have said. He had not known that the King examined every application from a Muslim convert. He had imagined that Feisal himself had power to grant permission, and had hoped to secure it. But now he could see it was no good pleading. Feisal had said his last word. There was nothing for it but to wait, with as good a grace as possible. He determined that he would not let the Emir see his disappointment.

When he had finished speaking Feisal had made no gesture of dismissal, but remained sitting in the same position, with his hands upon his knees. The silence lasted for ten minutes, but Chale, watching intently for a sign, perceived that it was not yet time for him to go. This time, curiously enough, he did not feel embarrassed by the silence. It seemed to settle like a benediction upon that great chamber. It was unbroken even by a whisper from the Arabs who lined the hall. The only sound Chale could hear was the regular breathing of the watchful negro guard who squatted behind him.

The Emir remained perfectly motionless, yet Chale could see that he was intensely alert. The silence was not like that which sometimes falls upon a company of Europeans when no one has anything to say. This silence was not dumbness; it was deliberate, a kind of ceremonial stillness, a mute expression of the Arab attitude to life, which holds that wisdom is made up of ten parts, nine of which are silence and the tenth brevity of speech, and

JEDDAH

that the tongue is a lion which must be chained and a sword which must be sheathed. Chale became part of the silence, steeped in it; until he felt as though cool spiritual water were soothing the fever from his troubled mind.

At length a negro slave entered the hall, carrying a tray with small handleless cups and a large brass pot of coffee. He poured a few drops into one of the cups and presented it to the Emir. Then he served Chale and the Syrians. This coffee, which came from the Yemen, was green, with a lovely and exotic fragrance, and Chale afterwards learned that the pick of the crop was reserved for the Arabian Emirs. It was delicious. Chale knew the correct procedure here. If the cup were returned to the slave the right way up it would be filled again, and this would go on, even to thirty or more times, until it was turned upside down and shaken. He had his cup refilled three times, and then, seeing that the others had finished, he turned it upside down and handed it to a slave. Then he said:

“I thank your Highness for the interest you have taken in my request. Insh-a-Allah! May it please God that I reach Mecca!”

“Insh-a-Allah!” replied the Emir gravely.

“I ask your Highness’s leave to depart.”

“It is granted.”

Chale rose and extended his hand, murmured “Assalamu-alaikoum,” walked backwards a few steps, then turned and left the audience chamber.

Hamdi Bey followed him, took him by the hand, and led him back to the hall, where Saleh was waiting.

“What do you think of my chances?” asked Chale: he found that he could talk frankly to this charming and friendly Turk.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

"Very successful," replied Hamdi Bey. "Nothing could have been better. You are a lucky man."

"But the King's letter? Will that take long to come?"

"It is a mere formality. Remember that God is with those who are patient. Don't worry, you will reach Mecca, and there we will meet again."

"Insh-a-Allah," said Chale.

Chapter X

KING IBN SAUD

CHALE's interview with Feisal was followed by a period of waiting and suspense. He learned that the Emir of Jeddah had sent his papers on to Mecca. Almost every day he telephoned to Getan to find out if there were any news. At last Getan told him that Feisal had stamped the papers. Days of restless expectation ensued. Then one morning Saleh brought the tidings that the papers had been returned. Chale could make his declaration of faith and go to Mecca.

Chale felt exalted. All his scheming and striving and sacrifices had been worth while. In a condition of intense excitement he went with Saleh to the office of the Chief of Police—only to find that the papers which had come from Mecca were not his, but those of a Chinese convert who had also been given the Muslim name of Abdul Rahman, and had been waiting in Jeddah for over three years, selling water and doing odd jobs to keep himself alive until permission came for him to set out upon the Haj.

So the Chinese Abdul Rahman went to Mecca, while Chale and Munirah waited on.

Once again Chale schooled himself to patience, but as the days went by he found it more and more difficult to remain calm. Pilgrims were going up to Mecca all the time. The city was full of passing people. He would watch them streaming through the gate out on to the Mecca road with envy in his heart, wondering how long it would be

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

before he could follow them. Sometimes he would be invited to sit with the badals and sheikhs in the Customs, watching the examination of the pilgrims who had just landed. At least he was through all that. He noticed that many of the more ignorant pilgrims became so confused when suddenly faced with a concourse of badals that they were unable to answer questions put to them. Saleh told him that if a pilgrim arrived in Jeddah without money he might name a sheikh and announce his poverty by crying out "Miskin" at the same time. Custom decreed that the sheikh named was then bound to see that he reached Mecca and Arafat, and returned in safety, even though he were penniless; and provided that the word "miskin" was uttered at the public examination, and that he was indeed without resources, all Government dues would be remitted.

By this time the Egyptians were beginning to arrive in large numbers. They came in steamers reserved for Egyptians only. They were anxious to impress the Hedjaz Arabs with their importance, and had special barges to take them ashore, huge lighters which carried over a thousand each trip. When the men had landed, the women would follow, some of them enormous creatures weighing over twenty stone (Egyptian husbands like their ladies large), who were carried from barge to beach by sweating negroes shouting "Labayyk Allahumma labayyk" as they came.

This continuous influx of pilgrims was to Chale a torturing reminder that the day of the Haj was drawing near. Both Saleh and Getan were doing their utmost for him, but he found small consolation in the philosophy of the other Arabs with whom he came in contact.

KING IBN SAUD

"If you do not go to Mecca this year, brother," said one, "if God pleases you will go next year or the year after. God is greatest, and he will do whatever is best for his servants. If he wishes you to go to Mecca this year, then you will go. So why worry? Neither King nor emir can stop you: they are but part of the system of the world. God alone is great."

But although Chale had become a Muslim he had not succeeded in absorbing the Oriental attitude to time. To him everything depended on his reaching Mecca that year. He could not possibly afford to wait another twelve months. When he learned from Getan that Emir Feisal had gone off on a shooting trip and probably would not be back in Mecca for six weeks he became terribly distressed, although Munirah did her best, during their snatched meetings in Saleh's room, to calm him and console him with her steadfast courage which never failed her.

"Soon we shall be as camels which have reached the shade of sycamore-trees," she assured him. "And remember that good news travels slowly, and only bad news travels fast."

He drew comfort from her words; but the weeks went by, and still the papers did not come.

To occupy his mind he began to make inquiries about the system of slavery in force in Saudi-Arabia. He knew from his reading that, under Islam, slavery had never reached the degree of horror and degradation it had in lands controlled by the white man. In Muslim countries it had never been a wholesale traffic with vested interests, like the African trade to the West Indies and America, or like the blackbirding in the Pacific, where within living memory whole islands had been forcibly depopulated

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

to provide labour for the sugar plantations of Fiji and Northern Queensland.

In Mohammed's day slavery had been a recognized institution, dating back to time immemorial, just as it had been in the time of Christ. Complete abolition had been an impossibility; but it seemed to Chale that Mohammed's attitude had been more humane than Christ's. Christ had never forbidden slavery; Mohammed had at least restricted it by clear decrees. By the law of the Koran no Muslim might be made a slave, only unbelievers who were captured in war; even they might be freed or ransomed when the war was over. Masters of slaves were enjoined to treat as equal those whom their right hands possessed, as the Koran put it, to give them the same food as themselves, to clothe them in the same way, and to educate them. Their faults were to be forgiven even to seventy times a day, and harsh treatment could be atoned for only by setting them free. Traffic in slaves was frowned upon: "The worst of men is he who sells men," declared the Prophet. He recommended those of his followers who were solitary to marry their slaves, and commanded every master not only to allow freedom to slaves who desired it, but to give them a portion of the wealth that God had given him. He taught that the voluntary emancipation of a slave was an act of the highest virtue and that the atonement of certain sins could be attained only by the freeing of a slave.

Mohammed himself had practised what he preached. To obtain the freedom of the Persian slave Suleiman he had planted three hundred date-palms with his own hands. He had given one of his cousins in marriage to a freed slave, awarded the coveted post of muezzin to another,

KING IBN SAUD

and conferred the command of a Muslim army on a third.

Chale's investigations showed him that although slavery existed in Saudi-Arabia, Mohammed's teaching was followed, with the exception that slaves were still sold in the markets of Mecca and Medina. Most of them were descendants of slaves who had been captured in battle or brought from Abyssinia. Ibn Saud had promised to co-operate with the British Government in the suppression of the slave trade. The importation of slaves was no longer legal, although it seemed probable that a certain amount of smuggling went on. Chale had many opportunities of observing the conditions of the Arabs' slaves and found them happy and content, treated as members of the family, as the Prophet had enjoined.

In the ordinary Arab household some of the servants might be free, but most of them were slave girls. They were rarely used as concubines; never against their will. He discovered that an Arab wife objected to her husband sleeping with a slave girl as strongly as an English wife would object to hers sleeping with a parlour-maid. Occasionally a young bachelor in a family might have a liaison with one of the slave girls, but there would be serious trouble if she had a child, unless he married her, when she would become free.

Men and women slaves who had been freed by their masters usually remained on in the household as servants; some became agents of their masters, and Chale met one who had set up in a business of his own. They seldom left a family of their own accord, and if they had to be turned loose upon the world they were generally very unhappy. Masters rarely sold their slaves, who as a rule

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE .

came into the market only when their owners had died and had left no children to take them on.

In Mecca and Medina, Chale learned, slavery was not interfered with, but in Jeddah the British Minister, at the behest of the League of Nations, was doing his best to discourage the institution. If a slave entered the compound of the Legation, which was British territory, and applied for emancipation he was given protection and shipped across the Red Sea to Port Sudan. Once there he would be declared free, but would be put to work on a wage until he repaid his passage money. After that he would have to find work as best he could, and since the labour market was congested might find himself unemployed, and so worse off than when he had been a slave.

Chale could see that the Arabs did not care for this high-handed behaviour of the Legation in their affairs, but they tolerated it because they feared to excite the displeasure of the British Government. Occasionally awkward incidents occurred. Saleh told Chale that one of Emir Feisal's slaves had recently absconded with some valuables from his master's palace at Mecca. He reached Jeddah, seventy miles away, went to the Legation, and claimed protection. The Emir, on learning his whereabouts, ordered the police to kill him when he left the Legation. The Minister sent a wireless message calling for a destroyer to come to Jeddah and train her guns on the town when he hoisted a red flag in his compound. The destroyer arrived. The Minister left the compound in person with the slave and was confronted by the police posted outside his gate. Drawing his revolver, he warned the Chief of Police that if his men killed the slave the

KING IBN SAUD

city would be bombarded. The Chief of Police was in a disagreeable dilemma, but the bluff worked. Ultimately he let the slave pass, and the destroyer took the man to Port Sudan. The Chief of Police spent six months in prison for disobeying the Emir's orders, and, said Saleh, was lucky not to have been executed.

Since every Arab Chale met agreed that a Muslim could acquire no greater merit than by buying a slave and releasing him or her while performing the pilgrimage, he decided that he would buy one himself. He asked Saleh how much a slave would cost: preferably a young girl, who would be able to look after Munirah until they reached Mecca and find work as a servant once she were free. Saleh told him that the price would be between fifteen and thirty gold pounds. Chale thought he could afford that. Saleh promised to make inquiries. He seemed pleased at the idea. Chale fancied that he would receive a rake-off on any business done.

Two evenings later Saleh invited Chale to accompany him to one of the innumerable coffee-shops, where a slave-broker would be waiting.

The broker proved to be a dark, furtive person, who seemed to live in perpetual dread of being spied upon. As he spoke he glanced jerkily from side to side. His eyes were never still, and from time to time he would make sudden darting movements with his hands, which was very disconcerting.

After some conversation and initial suspicion he admitted that he had a slave girl to sell. The loveliest girl he had ever seen. Marvellous. Her price was forty pounds. Yes, that might be a lot of money, but she was worth it. There wasn't another girl on the market like her. It was

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

a bargain price. Wallah, her hindquarters were magnificent!

"All right," said Chale. "Bring her along to-morrow night."

When Chale met Munirah in Saleh's room next day he found her terribly upset. He was amazed. When he had first suggested the idea of buying a slave to set free at Mecca she had agreed that it would be an excellent thing to do, but now she was resolutely against it. He tried to argue with her, but it was no good.

"Buy this girl if you wish," she said sobbing. "But if you do I shall not go to Mecca with you. You can go with your slave, and I will go back alone to Kuching."

Chale told her he was only following the Koran's teaching. But nothing would appease her. She insisted that if he bought the girl she would go back. He tried to find out why.

For a long time she would not tell him. Then it came out. The girl was beautiful. Saleh's wife had told her so. Every one in the house knew about her. And Saleh's wife had said "Once your husband gets that slave he will sleep with her. She is so lovely that no man could resist her." Then she burst into tears again. Chale had never seen her so worked up. It was the first disagreement they had ever had. He knew perfectly well that the women had been teasing her. He tried to explain this. He swore to her that he would not touch the girl. They would simply take her to Mecca and free her there. Munirah refused to listen to him. She ran back to the women's quarters, tears streaming down her face.

Chale was terribly worried. He had never thought

about the girl like that. His thoughts had been sublimated from sex for weeks, otherwise he would have made love to Munirah herself. He had tried to tell Munirah this, but she had refused to listen. Now he began to wonder if he had better give up the idea of buying the girl. But he is a man for whom it is almost impossible to abandon a line of action once taken. Had his make-up been otherwise he would never have got so far as Jeddah. So he determined to buy the girl and show Munirah that her fears were groundless.

That night, when they had finished supper in Saleh's room, one of the male slaves entered and beckoned silently to Chale. He went down to the ground floor, where he found the broker waiting for him, accompanied by a veiled figure dressed in black from head to foot.

"This is the girl," whispered the broker, looking furtively round the room.

"Let's have a look at her," said Chale.

The broker darted round her, making little quick dashes, like a lizard. Suddenly his hand shot out and he plucked her veil away.

"There!" he cried. "Isn't she beautiful?"

But she wasn't. She was an old hag of a negress, worn out and shrivelled. Chale shuddered.

"Don't you see what good condition she is in?" persisted the broker. "See how strong she is! Look at her buttocks! Have you ever seen buttocks like these? She'll be able to work for years."

The negress stood motionless, staring stupidly. Before Chale could say a word the broker flicked the veil back over her face, took her by the arm, and led her hastily to the door, looking behind him as he went.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

"Here, wait a minute!" cried Chale. "Where are you taking her?"

"Ssh!" whispered the broker. "You can't be too careful with these girls. She might go running off to the Legation. I will meet you again to-morrow."

He peered out into the street, then vanished through the doorway, still holding the negress by the arm.

Unknown to Chale, Munirah had been peeping down through the latticed window of the women's quarters trying to catch a glimpse of the radiant beauty he was preparing to buy. It had been too dark for her to see the girl, but it was not long before the news of Chale's discomfiture travelled through the house. Every one thought it a grand joke, with the possible exception of Saleh, who must have become less sure of his commission. Munirah was completely appeased, and met Chale all smiles next morning. She meekly begged his pardon for having been silly, and gave him full permission to buy the slave.

The broker called again that evening, without the slave. He was prepared to do business. Chale told him she was too expensive. The broker refused to take a pound less.

"Slaves are hard to come by in Jeddah nowadays, brother," he insisted. "And you will never see another girl like that."

Chale hoped the broker was right. He tried one more attempt at bargaining.

"No, brother. Wallah! Forty pounds is the lowest price. You must know she is worth double that."

Rather relieved, Chale refused the deal. Merit or no merit, his common humanity told him that it would be useless to free a poor worn-out old thing who would find it hard to earn a living as a servant and was past all hope

KING IBN SAUD

of getting a husband. It was kinder to let her be sold into a family who needed an extra slave. Then at least she would be sure of food and a roof over her head.

When the broker heard Chale's decision he did not attempt to argue; he did not even suggest a lower price, but with a hasty word of farewell darted out into the darkness of the night.

After that experience Chale decided to abandon the project of freeing a slave, and the following morning his thoughts were turned into other channels by the first piece of good news he had had for weeks. By that time he had learned enough of the bureaucratic system of the Hedjaz to know that every convert applicant for the Haj was allotted a number. This number, written on a card, always preceded the pilgrim's dossier, and was sent as advice that the papers would shortly be on their way.

That morning, when Chale paid his usual visit to the Emir's office, he learned that his number had arrived from Mecca. Saleh was jubilant. At last all was well, thanks be to God! In a few days his papers would follow, and he would be able to start for Mecca in plenty of time.

But another fortnight passed before they reached the Emir, duly stamped by Feisal. The Emir passed them on to the Chief of Police, who sent for Chale and told him that he might now make his declaration of faith before the Kadi, the Muslim registrar. The Kadi had been authorized to take the declaration and would prepare an ehlam, the document acknowledging that Chale had been received into Islam.

Chale hastened round to the Kadi with Saleh. The Kadi told him he had as yet received no authority to take

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

the declaration. He could not take it without seeing that the papers were in order. Back went Chale to the Chief of Police, only to find that his papers had been returned to the Emir.

By this time Chale was in a frenzy. One thing after another seemed to be conspiring to hold him up, and there were only twelve days left.

He rushed back to Mustapha Babli, who, after showing the Kadi the number of the letter, persuaded him first to speak to the Chief of Police by telephone, and then to take down Chale's declaration in a book. Chale insisted that the document should be prepared and submitted at once to the Emir himself. This caused further argument and delay. The Kadi was scandalized by such haste. Finally Chale got his way, and negotiated the document through a chain of clerks, each of whom scrupulously recorded in a book its number and particulars, and at last it reached the Emir himself. Then it had to go back from the Emir, down the chain of clerks to the post, and thence to the Mecca Secretariat, where Getan, knowing of its despatch, rescued it, and negotiated it up the chain of Meccan officials to Emir Feisal. Eventually Chale heard that it had been signed by Feisal and returned to Jeddah. Once again he presented himself at the Emir's office, where he received the worst blow of all.

"Your papers are now in order," the Emir told him, with a beaming smile, "and they formally admit that you are a Muslim. I congratulate you. But I have received no authority to give them to you, and whether you will be allowed to go to Mecca until six years have passed I do not know."

Most men would have thrown their hands in then. But

KING IBN SAUD

Chale is a fighter. By this time the tranquillity he had learned from Islam had gone by the board. He was frantic with anxiety, but he refused to give in. He pitted his will against the Emir's. He argued, he implored. But the Emir was as determined as he. Nothing would induce him to hand over the papers without authority. He refused to telephone. The papers must be returned to Mecca again. He would send them at once, and he would ask for authority to give them to Chale. More he would not do.

Chale returned to Saleh's house in a state of utter dejection. For the first time since he had left Kuching he began to feel that he would never get to Mecca after all. Even Saleh had become despondent.

But when they reached the house they found every one in a bubble of excitement. Mustapha Babli had just heard that Ibn Saud was coming to Jeddah in three days to express his sympathy to the British Minister on the death of King George, which (although Chale had not heard of it) had taken place several weeks previously. Here was a chance, said Mustapha Babli: an audience with the King might solve everything.

But how was he to get an audience? Chale asked. The King was accessible to all Muslims, even to foreign consuls. But for one who had no papers it would not be so easy. Mustapha Babli thought Jamil would be the man. Jamil had charge of the catering arrangements at the palace. He was in close touch with the King. They must telephone to Getan so that he could ask the King's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Fuad Hamza, to get hold of the papers. He would be travelling to Jeddah with the King. And when Chale had his audience he could

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

ask the King to endorse the ehlam, which would authorize the Emir to hand over the papers, and admit Chale to Mecca.

Early on the morning the King was expected Chale and Saleh made their way to the city gate and walked out on to the palace where Emir Feisal had stayed. On the plain behind the palace was a collection of ramshackle huts where the cooks were preparing an enormous banquet, roasting sheep whole over the fires. Saleh told Chale that as many as seventy sheep might be killed during one of these short visits. The King himself was a mighty trencherman, said Saleh, and would eat half a sheep at a sitting and drink half a kerosene-oil tin of camel's milk.

There they found Jamil, who, busy though he was, promised his good offices at once. As Chale had already learned, Jamil was a man of action. He told Chale just how to set about the affair. Taking up a Meccan newspaper, he tore off a scrap, and having produced from somewhere within his mishlah a stub of pencil he wrote a few words in Arabic. This note he promised to hand to one of the King's attendants, who would do him the favour of bringing it to the King's notice. He would also see Fuad Hamza, so that there should be no hitch.

The three of them then walked to the front of the palace, and reached it just in time to watch the King and his retinue arrive. It was as curious a procession as Chale had ever seen. Ibn Saud travelled in state, but not as an Oriental potentate of legend, with a cavalcade of horses and a train of camels. Part of Chale's dream was to bring progress to Arabia: and he saw a measure of it before him then. For Ibn Saud's retinue preceded and followed him

KING IBN SAUD

in a column of over a hundred Ford cars. On either side of his own car three of his personal bodyguard of negroes were standing on the running-board. They were dressed in scarlet, with drawn swords in their hands and pistols in their belts. The King's ministers followed him. The cars in the van and in the rear were filled with Wahabbi police.

Being well known to the police on duty, Jamil approached the palace door unmolested. He passed within to whisper a few words into the ear of one of the King's personal Wahabbi attendants, and gave him the scrap of newspaper, which the man pressed into the King's hand as he began to ascend the palace steps.

Chale saw the King stop, hold the note close to his face, and then speak to Fuad Hamza. He murmured a word to the Wahabbi and passed on. In a few minutes Jamil joined Chale.

"The King will grant you an audience after the midday prayer," he said. "Truly God is merciful."

They returned to the huts. It was still only ten o'clock, but the King had left Mecca early, and the food was being carried into the palace, steaming hot. Chale joined Saleh and Jamil in a meal, and then strolled alone to watch the stream of visitors arriving at the palace: foreign ministers and consuls, merchants and sheikhs, who were attending the King's first audience; and with them lesser men, simple Bedouins waiting for admittance to their master, who does justice, gives advice, threatens, punishes, helps and rules his people in the spirit of patriarchal days. As Chale watched them he rehearsed in his mind what he should say when his turn came: everything depended on what he said and how he said it. It was his last chance

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

of reaching Mecca in time for the Haj, and he was determined not to let it slip.

He had heard much of Ibn Saud—or Abdul Aziz bin Saud, to give him his correct appellation—and had conceived a great admiration for him and for the work he had done. To show him against his background it is necessary to give some details of his history here.

The Great War left the Hedjaz, the Holy Land of Islam, an independent State under its ruler King Hussein, who lived in Mecca. One of his sons had become King of Iraq and the other Emir of Transjordan.

But Hussein was a disappointed man. On the outbreak of the War, when Arabia was under Turkish sovereignty, he had been Emir of Mecca, and had been mainly responsible for allowing the Arab revolt, started by Lawrence with British gold and rifles, to proceed. Lawrence had promised him that the British Government would make him the Caliph of the Muslims if their plans succeeded.

That promise, through no fault of Lawrence's, had not been kept. The result was that Hussein adopted an attitude of sullen defiance to the British, and took it upon himself to enlist the sympathy of the Muslim world and proclaim himself Caliph. He made no effort to control his fierce and unruly Bedouin subjects who lived by robbing and slaughtering the pilgrims on their way to the Holy Cities. So powerful did these marauders grow that it became unsafe for travellers to go outside the walls of Jeddah without an armed guard. On one occasion they held up a caravan of twenty thousand camels on its way to Medina, robbed it, and turned it back to the coast.

The Muslims of India were gravely perturbed. They

KING IBN SAUD

held that the Holy Land of Islam belonged to the whole Muslim world and not exclusively to the Arabs, and from among them rose two leaders, known as the Ali brothers, who conceived a scheme for deposing Hussein and setting up in his stead a ruler whose policy should be dictated by a council, composed of members drawn from the chief cities of Islam, sitting in Mecca. They soon secured an enormous following, and succeeded in raising a vast sum of money.

When their plans were complete they went to Turkey and appealed to Mustapha Kemal for his aid in dethroning Hussein. There they met with an unexpected reception. Mustapha Kemal told them that the Muslims of India were traitors who had fought for the British during the War, and ordered them to leave Turkey within twenty-four hours.

The Ali brothers returned to India discomfited, but in the meantime the problem of the Hedjaz had been engaging the attention of St John Philby, a brilliant officer of the Indian Civil Service, who, while Lawrence was stirring up the Arab revolt, had been sent from Iraq into Nejd, on the eastern border of the Hedjaz, to persuade its ruler, then the Emir Saud, to attack a certain Turkish garrison. Philby's mission had been successful, and, having become deeply attached to the Emir, he remained his political adviser while acting as agent of his own country at the same time. Later he embraced Islam and took the name of Abdullah Philby.

Since the majority of the pilgrims to Mecca were British subjects, it became essential that the British Government should take steps to ensure their safety. Emir Saud had a firm hold over the fierce Wahabbis, those

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

conservative-minded Arabs of Nejd, and Philby proposed that he should be supported in a campaign designed to place him on the throne of a united Arabia and to make the way to Mecca safe for the pilgrims of all nations.

The British Government and Emir Saud agreed. The difficulty was money. Some one thought of the Ali brothers' Indian fund. They consented to the plan, and handed over the money. It was invested in arms and munitions of war which were passed into Riadth, Emir Saud's capital, from Bahrein, on the Persian Gulf, and the Wahabbis were equipped for a campaign, which, since Hussein had forbidden them the pilgrimage, they undertook with enthusiasm and religious fervour. Hussein was driven from his throne, and, with his wives and his gold, was taken in a British cruiser to Cyprus. Later he joined his son in Transjordan, where he died.

Ibn Saud was proclaimed King of Saudi-Arabia. It may have been his original intention to establish some form of democratic government in Mecca, but he decided that a benevolent despotism was more suited to the needs of the Arabs, and he chose to rule alone, keeping his seat of government at Riadth, some six hundred miles from Jeddah.

In spite of the Ali brothers' disappointment at their ideal of a controlling body in Mecca not being attained, they had the satisfaction of knowing that their work in its essentials had not been in vain. Arabia had needed a strong ruler. Ibn Saud proved himself as strong as he was sagacious. He ascended the throne just in time to check the progress of the decay which was weakening the foundations of Islam. Under Hussein's rule the fundamental teaching of Mohammed was being disregarded. During

KING IBN SAUD

the rule of the Turks elaborate tombs had been built over the graves of the Prophet's friends and followers, and these were improved and maintained by Hussein's Government. Ignorant Muslims, influenced by their magnificence, would stand before them praying for favours from those whose bones lay buried below. Thus Mohammed's teaching, expressed repeatedly in the Koran, that not he or his followers but God alone must be worshipped, was being forgotten.

The conservative Wahabbis, who are the puritans of Islam, were profoundly shocked by this state of affairs, and razed all the tombs to the ground. By the relentless administration of the civil law of the Koran, Ibn Saud purged the Hedjaz of its evils. The marauding Bedouins were hunted down. The villages in the hills which had once been their fastnesses were mercilessly broken up, and the roads to Mecca and Medina were made safe once more for peaceful pilgrims from all parts of the Muslim world. To this day murderers are summarily beheaded; thieves have their hands cut off and strung across a city street for all to see; drunkards are punished with six months' imprisonment and eighty stripes a month, and adulterers suffer death.

These measures, drastic though they are, have transformed the life of Arabia. The teaching of the Prophet is being brought back to its pristine simplicity. No longer do pilgrims take their lives in their hands when they leave the gates of Jeddah. The rights of property are respected. Theft is almost unknown. If a pilgrim should drop even a packet of dried fish on the way it will remain where it fell until picked up by the police, no one daring to touch it. Chale heard the story of a pilgrim who had

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

brought a packet containing lentils to the police-station in Mecca.

"I picked up these beans on the road," he reported.

"How do you know there are beans in the packet?" demanded the police officer. "Surely you must have looked inside? Therefore you are not honest! Wallah, it is clear you had hoped for treasure and not for beans!"

And so that pilgrim lost his hand.

Chale had himself seen the effects of these changes, and he was convinced that Islam, and the world beyond Islam, had cause to be grateful to Ibn Saud for the regeneration of Arabia. But while much had been achieved, much more remained to be done, and the lessons he had learned in Jeddah had made Chale more anxious than ever to further the King's work. He knew that Ibn Saud was hampered on every side by lack of revenue. He could not borrow, since Islam forbade the payment or receipt of interest. But now that oil had been discovered near Riadth, and a company given a concession to work it, and now that an attempt was being made to develop the ancient gold-mines of King Solomon near Medina on modern lines, he felt that wealth might yet come to Arabia; wealth which would enable her to exert an even greater influence over the Muslim world. He longed to tell the King of his dream for Islam, but knew that he must wait. He must first reach Mecca, and prove himself.

After the midday prayer he and Saleh entered the palace. The guards were more numerous than on his visit to Emir Feisal, for an attack on the King's life had been made by four Yemenites in the previous year, and every possible precaution was taken to ensure his safety.

Saleh waited below. Chale was handed on from one

KING IBN SAUD

guard to another up the stairs, where a party of ten heavily armed soldiers was posted. Here one of the King's secretaries met him and escorted him into the great audience hall where Feisal had received him. This time the chamber was lined with black slaves who sat cross-legged on the floor, armed with pistols, swords, and daggers.

The King was seated on the throne of ebony and mother-of-pearl, in the same attitude as Feisal, his hands upon his knees. Even in that position Chale could see that he was tall and powerful. His complexion was a rich deep brown, and his features sharp and clear-cut. He had a beard and a small moustache. One of his eyes was blind, and had a small white spot on it, but the other was penetrating and intelligent. He was wearing the strict Bedouin costume, a thick mishlah of camel's hair, edged with gold embroidery, a red headcloth with white spots, a gold igal, and Bedouin sandals of camel leather. He carried no weapon. To Chale he seemed a true son of the desert.

What struck Chale most about him was his alert restlessness. He had none of his son Feisal's immobility. His body was never still, and his head turned this way and that as he looked keenly from one person to another, although his hands never left his knees.

Chale was presented by Fuad Hamza, the Foreign Secretary. The King touched his hand. He was given permission to be seated. There was a brief interval of courteous silence. Then the King said:

"Whence come you?" His voice was strong and vibrant, and he spoke in Arabic of purer tone than that to which Chale had become accustomed in the conversation of the Arabs of Jeddah and Mecca.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

"From far Sarawak, your Majesty," answered Chale. "I wish to go to Mecca, to perform the Haj, so that I may comply with the fifth pillar of Islam."

The King looked severely at him, without much interest, Chale thought.

"How long have you been a Muslim?" he demanded.

Once again Chale felt justified in answering, "My heart has been Muslim for six years."

"At the time you became a Muslim, what did you say?"

"I believe in God and in the oneness of God, and that Mohammed is the true Prophet of God."

This seemed to give the King satisfaction. For a few moments he regarded Chale intently. Then he said, firmly but with courtesy:

"Of course, Philby came to me in Riadth and said he would like to become a Muslim. My heart was glad, and I allowed him to go to Mecca. But all converts are not like Abdullah Philby. So that I have been forced to make a rule that converts must not only have been Muslims for six years, but must have lived in Jeddah for six years. This is to protect Mecca, for none but a true believer may enter it."

"But, your Majesty, I am a true believer."

"If pilgrims are genuine, I do not wish to prevent them from going to Mecca. That would be against the will of God. We have given Arabia peace, which it had not enjoyed for centuries. We believe in the unstained creed of the Koran and the righteousness of our belief has been proved by the success which God has granted us. We have opened the gates of Mecca to Egyptians, Syrians, and Indians. Pilgrims of every nation may enter the Holy

KING IBN SAUD

Land if their hearts be true. But if they be not true, then I will protect Mecca." He said this in an aggressive, emphatic manner.

"The Koran provides that every Muslim shall be allowed to make the pilgrimage," Chale reminded him respectfully.

"True. But the Koran also provides that every effort shall be made to turn away those who are not true Muslims," said the King.

Chale's brain was working fast. This new regulation had taken him completely by surprise. He thought it likely that the King was trying to test his faith, and he knew that he must find some answer which would appeal to his intelligence.

"I consider it unjust to detain a man six years in Jeddah, to see into his heart," he said boldly.

"Why?"

"Because, your Majesty, even your own ancestors must have been unbelievers before they embraced Islam. Did the Holy Prophet (on whom be the blessings of peace and eternal felicity) say to them, 'You must wait six years before you go to Mecca, that I may know your hearts'?"

This answer seemed to please the King. He became more amenable.

"Where are your papers?" he asked.

Chale explained that Emir Feisal had passed them, but that the Emir of Jeddah had not yet received permission to give them up. Then Fuad Hamza came to the rescue. The papers had been returned to Mecca. Sheikh Abdul Rahman Getan had reminded him about them and he had brought them in case an audience should be granted.

"Let me see them," commanded the King.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Fuad Hamza produced the papers. The King examined them; then, holding them in his hand, he turned his gaze on Chale as though he would search the secrets of his heart.

"Will your Majesty be pleased to pass my papers now?" asked Chale.

"This is not a matter for casual action," was the reply.

"But, as your Majesty knows, it will be a great hardship for me if I cannot perform the Haj this year, after making so long a journey."

"There are others to be consulted."

"But why should your Majesty wish to deny me the right to go?"

"I wish to deny no one who is a true Muslim."

"And what reason has your Majesty for thinking I am not?"

"I cannot sign this now," declared the King. "Tomorrow I return to Mecca. There I will consult the Ulemas."

Chale's heart sank. He knew that once his case came before the council of aged Arabs who advised the King on matters pertaining to the faith the delay might be endless. He became desperate. By this time he had sized up Ibn Saud and had come to the conclusion that bold measures would serve him best. The King was a fighter. He would appreciate a fighter. Before Islam all men were brothers, and that gave him the right to speak his mind.

"I came to Arabia," he said, "with the intention of performing the Haj in my heart. You, as King of the Faithful, well know that if a man's heart is truly Muslim and he is truly bent upon making the Haj, God will count him as having done so, even if his body be prevented from

reaching the Holy City. It is written in the Koran that if any man prevent a true believer from attaining that greatest of earthly desires he must take upon himself the sins of the other, who will be absolved from them as though he had been purified upon the Plain of Arafat."

He paused to let his words take effect. The King was silent, regarding Chale intently, his restless body still for the first time since the audience began. Chale had worked himself up into a state of intense emotional excitement. He did not care what happened to him. His whole will was set on dominating the King's. Even when he was re-creating the scene for me, months afterwards in London, his face was haggard and sweat stood out upon his forehead. I can see him, standing in that audience chamber, fighting with the only weapons he possessed: his quick brain and his valiant determination. I can see his narrow blue eyes blazing, his long forefinger extended, pointing at the King as he made his final point.

"Is your Majesty, by preventing me from going to Mecca, prepared to accept the burden of my sins?"

As he said these words, so pregnant with grave implication to a Muslim, he watched the King's face. He told me that he saw it blench. Ibn Saud, King of Arabia, was shaken: because, believing the Koran, he knew Chale to be justified in what he said.

Even so, his dignity forbade him to relent.

"Your words are true, Abdul Rahman," he said. "To turn a true believer back from the Holy City is a grave responsibility, even for a king. Yet I cannot give my decision now. I must consult the Ulemas, and I will send you speedy word."

With that Chale had to be content. Coffee was handed

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

round, and after the usual interval he asked leave to depart. This time the King clasped his hand in his in a strong grip. For the first time he smiled.

Saleh thought Chale had done well, and when Chale asked Fuad Hamza that evening what his chances were Hamza replied :

“ You did well. I have never seen the King so stirred. If God pleases, within a few days you will be in Mecca.”

“ Insh-a-Allah,” said Chale. “ God will reward you for helping a true believer.”

Chapter XI

THE PILGRIM WAY

AGAIN more waiting. Waiting until Jeddah was almost empty, save for the police and for pilgrims, who, like Chale, were still hoping for permission to go. For in a Muslim's heart hope never dies. No Muslim will say, "I am not going on the Haj this year," for it may be God's will that he shall go at the latest moment. Chale hoped it might be so with him.

But the days passed, and still no word came from the King. Then, when there were only two days left, Saleh brought news that permission had come at last. God was greatest. This time there could be no mistake. Once again Chale hastened to the police office, praying that it would be for the last time. But once again he tasted bitter disappointment. The permission was for Munirah to go to Mecca, but not for him.

He returned to the house overcome by a terrible despondency. For the first time he felt defeated. "That's finished it," he thought. "You aren't to go this year." All his brave words to the King had gone for nothing. Strong though his faith was, it almost failed him then. It might be true, as the Koran taught, that God would accept the intention in his heart. But that wasn't the same as going. He didn't care whether Ibn Saud had to shoulder the burden of his sins or not. He had failed. After all his planning, after all his patience, he had failed. He wanted to see Mecca, to perform the ancient rites in

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

person, to stand in that great concourse of pilgrims upon the Plain of Arafat. And he was not to go. Muslim though his heart might be, he was still European enough to be unable to accept the bitterness of defeat with resignation. He told me that he wept.

Even Munirah, whose courage had always been so high, now abandoned hope.

"Adih!" she lamented. "How could we know that it would be so hard? As hard as drinking vinegar from the wings of a fly. And now we are like kites whose cords are broken."

"The lot of the coconut is to float, and the lot of the stone is to sink," said Chale dismally. "But at least the way is open to you, even though I must stay behind."

"The lid must not be parted from the box," she answered. "If you stay, I stay too."

"It is God's will that you shall go," he told her. "Your parents will be greatly shamed if you do not go."

That argument had weight with her. Reluctantly she agreed to go with a family of Indians they had met, who were leaving for Mecca next day.

Chale was on his way to make the necessary arrangements, glad to have some action to occupy his mind, when he met Saleh. He was wanted on the telephone, Saleh said. The Emir of Jeddah wished to speak to him.

They went together to the post-office. Chale got through to the Emir.

"Fuad Hamza has obtained the King's permission for you to go to Mecca," said the Emir's voice.

Chale felt as though he had been lifted upon the crest of a wave.

"All thanks be to God," he said.

THE PILGRIM WAY

The Emir's next words plunged him into the depths again.

"That message has only come by telephone, and not in writing. It will be necessary to wait for the letter of confirmation before you can be allowed to leave."

"But that may not come for days, your Highness!"

"It will be necessary to wait."

Now Chale was ready to fight again. All his old resolution returned to him, as life returns to a numbed limb.

"If I do not go now," he said, "the King will certainly be angry. It is his will that I should go."

There was a short silence at the other end of the line. Chale felt that his punch had gone home.

"I will telephone to Mecca and ask for the authority to be sent by special messenger," said the Emir at last. "It should arrive to-night."

"That is one who throws a stone while keeping the hand out of sight," muttered Saleh, as Chale put the receiver down. "Now we must telephone to Sheikh Abdul Rahman Getan to get in touch with Fuad Hamza, so that there may be no delay."

Late that evening the one-eyed Syrian police-officer delivered the papers to Chale. A special car had brought them from Mecca, he said. Everything was now in order. There was nothing to stop their going to Mecca in the morning. He was beaming with pleasure. His face had lost its look of sinister hostility. All his suspicions were gone. If the King had granted a man permission to go to Mecca he must be a true Muslim, and as a true Muslim himself One-eye rejoiced in Chale's good fortune.

"Truly, brother, God rewards him who seeks help with patience and with prayer," he said.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

"God is greatest," replied Chale with a full heart.
"He who relies upon God will attain his purpose."

He learned from Getan later that on returning to Mecca Ibn Saud had placed the papers before the Ulemas and had said :

"Here is a man who swears he has been converted to Islam. With my own ears I heard him pronounce the Shahadah. What is your ruling, brothers?"

The Ulemas peered over the papers and shook their heads.

"The Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace and all the blessings of God) decreed that whoever should say the Shahadah and declare his intention of performing the Haj should be admitted to Mecca," said they. "Therefore our advice is that he should be allowed to proceed, since it is forbidden that we should prevent a true believer from performing his duty to God."

Ibn Saud had accepted that ruling, and had given orders that no further obstacles should be placed in Chale's way.

Chale wished the Ulemas had been consulted earlier: the old gentlemen were obviously men of discrimination. But he realized that he had only Getan and Fuad Hamza to thank for getting his papers through in time, and was thankful he had named Getan as his sheikh.

Next day he was up before dawn. Saleh had gone up to Mecca the previous day with the remainder of Getan's pilgrims, but Munirah had decided to wait. They had only just time to reach Mecca, even by car, for the pilgrims would be going out to the Plain of Arafat that very afternoon; and even Mecca was seventy miles away.

All motor-cars in Arabia are owned by a Government

THE PILGRIM WAY

monopoly, and a duty of fifty pounds in gold sovereigns reverts to the King on each one imported. These cars may be hired from the monopoly, and Chale, having enlisted Jamil's help, betook himself to the Jeddah depot, only to find that every car was gone.

Panic seized him. Without a car they could not arrive in time. Jamil must find a car! Surely some one in Jeddah must have a car! He would pay anything for it. Anything the owner asked.

Jamil dashed off. Chale returned to the house, to find Munirah as frenzied with impatience as he. In half an hour Jamil returned with an enormous lorry, fitted with wooden benches. But the driver had not been expecting to go to Mecca. He had no pass. Without a pass the police would not let him through the city gates.

Old Mustapha Babli hobbled off to the police-station to secure the pass, while Chale and Munirah made their purification for the journey.

First came complete ablution, in unperfumed water, made in private, the water being poured over the head so that not a single hair remained dry: for Islam teaches that whereas prayer is the key of Paradise, ablution is the key to prayer.

Then they put on the ihram, the two pieces of seamless white cloth. Chale wore one piece round his waist and the other round his shoulders, and over it the black leather belt in which he kept his money: for this he had to pay the penalty of sacrificing a sheep after the pilgrimage. Munirah's ihram consisted of a long white garment which covered her head and reached to her feet, but left her face uncovered. Under it was another, caught at the ankles with pins. Both wore Arab sandals.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Once clothed in the ihram they were in a state of consecration. Until the pilgrimage was over they might not remove dirt from their bodies, cut their nails, or brush their hair. Nor might they hunt or kill any animal, or quarrel with any other pilgrim on their way. Standing on either side of Mustapha Babli, they repeated after him these words: "I intend to perform the Haj and to wear the ihram for the glory of God."

Their five suitcases were loaded into the lorry, and, having climbed in themselves, they started for the city gate, showed their papers, and lumbered out on to the Mecca road. At intervals along the road were huts from which police stepped out to examine their passes. But by now all the police had heard of Chale's case, and the stamping was a mere formality.

After they had gone some miles they began to overtake little parties of negro stragglers from the Sudan hurrying desperately along on foot in the vain hope of reaching Mecca by the morrow. They were so poor that they had been unable to hire any form of conveyance. Some of the women carried bundles on their heads, walking bolt upright across the shadeless plain. Men, women, and children were chanting the pilgrims' hymn, "Labayyk Allahumma labayyk."

Late though they were, faint as their chances were of reaching Mecca before morning, there was no despair in their faces, only joy, as they marched along in the blazing sunshine, clad in their ihram, chanting their hymn to God. When Chale stopped the lorry and picked up the weakest of them they gave him no thanks, but praised God for his mercy in allowing them to reach Mecca in time. Chale needed no thanks and expected

THE PILGRIM WAY

none. He knew, as they knew, that God was giving him an opportunity to acquire merit by helping them to perform the Haj, and the fact that he was breaking the law by carrying pilgrims who had not paid the Government dues to travel in a monopoly vehicle troubled him not at all.

The lorry bounced and bumped over the rough road, jolting the pilgrims from the wooden benches, forging its way through the clouds of dust. Chale described that ride to me as "absolute hell": but admitted that it was the strangest and most exciting he had ever known.

When they had crossed the open country, with here and there a pile of bones of a dead camel or donkey, they drew into a region of undulating hills. They passed the old forts which once had been the outposts of the Turks. Occasionally they would come to a roadside well and open shelters roofed with palm-leaves, under which the weary might rest and refresh themselves. As they drew nearer to the range of mountains Chale had seen from the sea the road rose steeply, winding along narrow gullies and deep ravines which showed Chale how easy it must have been for the Bedouin bandits to hold up the pilgrim caravans in the days before Ibn Saud.

They topped a pass, began to descend, and soon descried the two whitewashed boundary stones which marked the entry into that part of the Holy Land where none but Muslims might tread. Mecca was still hidden from sight, ten miles away, but as they passed the stones their companions in the lorry began to chant the Labay-*yka* with renewed fervour, shouting tremendously. Chale earnestly assured me that he himself felt intensely stirred.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

" You could *feel* the atmosphere," he said. " It wasn't only that one had entered the Holy Land. There was something more than that. A curious sense of ancientness. You felt that it was the creation not of centuries but of thousands of years. You see, even before the days of Abraham it was consecrated ground."

Five miles on they stopped the car. They had still five miles to go, but the driver said they must drop the pilgrims they had picked up, lest the police should see them and demand the Government dues. The pilgrims scrambled out, still chanting the Labayyka, adjusted their bundles, and began to trudge along the road. Suddenly Munirah clutched Chale's hand with a gasp of wonder and relief.

There was Mecca!

Chale stopped the lorry. He and Munirah got out and stood in silence, gazing down upon the Mother of Cities. It lay before them, gleaming in the sunshine, surrounded by a rampart of tawny hills. They could see the flat-topped buildings and the seven minarets of the great mosque.

But Chale had no eyes for the loveliness of that scene, upon which only a Muslim may look. The sight of Mecca gave him no æsthetic pleasure, but one of deep spiritual content. To him Mecca was less a city than an idea: an idea which for over a thousand years had drawn men and women from all over the world to gather in brotherhood and worship: and would draw them until the end of time. All his anxiety, his sacrifices, his tribulations, became as nothing as he gazed upon the city whose name had become a synonym for the goal of men's desires. Yet he felt no worldly triumph, no earthly

THE PILGRIM WAY

satisfaction in having reached it, as an explorer may feel when he climbs a mountain he has not climbed before. Mecca represented the beginning of a new life rather than a journey's end. He and Munirah stood on the hill-side in the sunlight and recited the Muslim prayer of gratitude: "All praise is due to God by whose favours alone man's purpose is accomplished." He felt an ineffable glow of peace steal over his spirit which transcended the petty needs and cares of earthly life. It was a sensation he had never had before. He knew he was in the presence of something that was linked to the Divine.

Chapter XII

THE MOTHER OF CITIES

Two miles outside the city stood a guard-house. The police examined Chale's papers strictly, but were courteous and smiling on finding them to be in order. The lorry moved on. The last barrier was passed. Chale felt uplifted with an immense and triumphant relief. For weeks he had been clinging to the last rung of the ladder of hope. Now he had got a firm foothold, but things had gone so lamentably wrong again and again that he had worked himself up into a condition of abnormal nervous apprehension. Even after they had passed the boundary stones he had been afraid that some other fantastic objection might arise to prevent their entering Mecca. But at last his panic subsided. He felt as secure as an exhausted swimmer who feels the touch of the ground beneath his toes. The ground he touched was holy : and now nothing could keep him from the Plain of Arafat, to which three hundred thousand other Muslim souls were cleaving their way. He and Munirah joined their voices with those who thronged about the lorry in the exultant chant :

“Labayyk Allahumma labayyk ! Labayyk Allahumma labayyk !”

Soon the lorry drew up before the western towers and gates of Mecca, which were open wide. Saleh, whose slave had been watching for them on the hillside for four hours, came out to meet them, his eyes bright with pleasure. Leaving the lorry, they entered the city and

THE MOTHER OF CITIES

began to make their way through the narrow streets, which were dense with pilgrims of many nations, all in their white ihram, the men wearing the black money-belts, like Chale. The crowd was so great that they could move only a few steps at a time. There was no attempt to control the traffic. But nobody seemed to mind. Camels and donkeys and honking cars became grotesquely entangled. Drivers leapt down, volubly trying to straighten out the jam, and only making it worse. Yet there was no squabbling, no loss of temper, no hard words. The minor trials of life failed to ruffle those triumphant pilgrims. There was a pervading atmosphere of intense achievement. Chale had the sensation himself. He felt it all about him. It was spiritual, yet immensely real: like a fragrant essence distilled from the joy in thousands of human hearts. He saw the expression of that joy, so fierce and yet so tranquil, on the faces of the pilgrims who clustered round him or passed him by. Some of them had been years upon the way, walking from Northern India, Turkestan, even from Western China. Black men, brown men, and yellow men: a tremendous multitude whose paths had converged on one glorious centre to form a mighty brotherhood with a single aim that transcended human ills: to lay down the burden of their sins. They had come, as God had promised his Prophet they should come, on foot and on every fleet camel, from every remote part of the Muslim world.

As they moved along with this press of people Chale had time to look about him, and saw that in Mecca there was none of the Oriental glamour his mind had associated with Baghdad, Damascus, and the other cities of

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

The Arabian Nights. Mecca was treeless, unadorned. Its unpaved, narrow streets were covered with loose, dark sand. Even the modern buildings erected by Ibn Saud conformed to the simplicity of the ancient style and preserved the harmony of a city still untouched by the civilization of the West. Brown like its Arabs, its camels, and its protecting mountains, to Chale it was startling in its serenity: a serenity fed by the emotions of its people. Within its walls all life was sacred, so that even a dog might not be killed, and human passions were kept in check. The thought came to him that in Mecca there must be less cruelty, less crime, less lust, less anger, than in any city in the world. Mecca was holy in more than name. He could accept its sanctity: spiritually, intellectually, emotionally. Once again he felt that comforting link with the Divine.

Their way led them through the bazaar, a maze of tortuous lanes and alleys, sheltered from the sun by cloths or woven palm-fronds, through which the light dimly filtered. The air was heavy and incense-laden. From the shops and stalls the pilgrim might buy anything his heart desired, save alcohol. Every pilgrim would buy something in Mecca, believing that what he bought was charged with holiness. There were fruit-stalls and grain-shops. Bakers, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, plied their trades under the eyes of the passers-by. There were sellers of scent and kohl, sellers of fez and turbans, sellers of cloth and calico, silk, and carpets. Arabic books were displayed to tempt the literate, and to allure the wealthy golden and silver trinkets, Indian bracelets, rings, and precious stones. There were souvenirs of Mecca, note-paper with pictures of Mecca, and thousands of strings

THE MOTHER OF CITIES

of mother-of-pearl praying-beads, palely gleaming. There were a hundred curio shops, where the needy had pawned their treasures, countless money-changers sitting beside their iron safes, and innumerable coffee-shops where men might sit and talk.

At length they reached Getan's house: tall, like those of Jeddah, and built of tawny stone. Within its great carved wooden gates was a courtyard in which a number of Arabs waited. Sheikh Getan limped towards Chale, beaming, and with hands outstretched.

"Welcome, brother!" he cried. "Welcome to my roof! You are come by God's will! Al-hamdu-lillah! The will of princes can avail nothing against the true believer, for God sees into the hearts of all!"

Chale knew that there was nothing bogus in the old man's delight. True, he would have lost caste, and possibly business, had he failed to get his pilgrim to Mecca; but there was more to it than that. At that moment he was more than Chale's agent, employed and paid to help him on his way. He was a Muslim greeting another Muslim whom God had accepted. Chale had justified himself, and Getan and all those with him were genuinely glad.

Chale returned his greeting warmly, and then said the customary prayer before entering the house:

"O God, I ask a blessing from thee when entering this house and a blessing when I leave it. In the name of God we enter and upon God, our Lord, we rely."

They went in and were introduced to Getan's brother, the Mayor of Mecca, who was also the King's caterer. Munirah was taken to the women's quarters. Every one was charming, delighted at the success of their efforts, which, Chale gathered, had been the talk of Mecca.

Coffee was served, and then Getan said they must lose no time in performing the tawaf, the ceremonial procession round the House of God in the great mosque: for that evening they must start for the Plain of Arafat.

"Since you do not yet know the ritual of the tawaf, brother," said Getan, "I have engaged for you a matawif who will instruct you in all you must do. Then you will not be like an untaught rider who gallops among the date-trees."

Chale thanked him. The guide-instructor, an Arab of holy aspect, was presented. Munirah joined them, but as they reached the gates of the house their way was barred by the crossed swords of two policemen who were on guard. The woman might not go out into the city with her face uncovered, they said. One of Getan's slave girls provided her with a mask of basket-work, and they set off.

In Mecca all roads lead to the Haram, the vast, roofless mosque which stands in the centre of the city, open to the sky and surrounded by a thick and lofty wall, in which there are twenty-four gates. There are several steps up to each gate and something like fifty down into the great enclosed courtyard, which is thus below the level of the ground. The Haram is rectangular in shape, but slightly irregular, about six hundred feet long by four hundred wide, with seven sand-coloured minarets rising above the wall. On the inside of the wall, running its entire length, is a cloistered colonnade, on one side of which, hollowed from the wall, are little caves in which the Zemzemis, who purvey the holy water, dwell. Beyond the cloisters the ground is covered with gravel, intersected by stone causeways which lead to the sacred Kaaba, the

THE MOTHER OF CITIES

House of God. By the gift of a rich Muslim an electric light plant has been installed, so that at night the ancient lamps of an older day are no longer used.

The attendants of the Haram are thirty negro eunuchs, dressed in coloured smocks belted with white sashes, and large white turbans, each carrying a long wooden staff. Their duties are to see that the women pilgrims are properly attired, to usher them to their special places at the times of prayer, and to keep the holy precincts clean.

The matawif led Chale and Munirah to the Bab-es-Salam gate on the north side of the Haram. In one of the small rooms provided with water-tanks and special dippers (with spouts like teapots) they performed the minor ablutions, this being permitted to wearers of the ihram. At the top of the steps they took off their sandals, which an attendant propped sole to sole against the wall. Then they were allowed to pass through one of the three great doors of the gate, saying: "In the name of God, there is no power or strength but in God." They placed the right foot first on the top step and went down into the holy place.

The cloisters and the great courtyard were crowded with pilgrims, some praying, some sleeping, some sitting in silent meditation, some walking to and fro, others telling their beads and muttering repeatedly "Al-hamdu-lillah!" as they fingered each one.

But Chale and Munirah looked not at them but at the sacred Kaaba, which stood in the centre of the Haram, the pivot around which the Islamic faith revolved, a plain oblong building of brown basalt, forty feet by thirty, its walls covered with an immense black cloth, with a water-spout of pure gold.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

The Kaaba is the very heart of Islam; the centre of a great circle of worshippers who approach it from all parts of the earth, and, when they have reached Mecca, stand facing it from different sides, but all with a single purpose and a single faith. The building itself is older than Islam, yet shows not an inch of subsidence in six thousand years. Its origin goes back into the mists of legend. There is a Muslim tradition that it was built by God before the days of man, reconstructed by Adam, and repaired by Abraham at the command of God. As time passed the Arab descendants of Abraham and Ishmael lapsed into paganism. One Bedouin tribe, the Koreish, became the hereditary guardians of the temple and the idols which had been set up. From this princely tribe Mohammed sprang, to incur the deadly enmity of his kinsmen when, enlightened by divine precept, he called upon them to destroy the idols and to worship the one God.

But even after he had been accepted as the Prophet of God he wisely preserved the ancient temple as the pivot of the new faith, investing it with fresh significance. For centuries the Arab tribes had been accustomed to march round it naked, in ceremonial worship of their idols. Mohammed destroyed the idols, and taught his followers to continue the customary circuit clad in the ihram and worshipping the one God in whom all lesser gods were merged. So that, since the time of Abraham, the Ancient House, as the Koran calls it, has never been without its pilgrims and its suppliants.

The Kaaba contains a single chamber with four praying-alcoves in it. Scores of gold and silver lamps suspended by chains, of varying lengths, hang from the roof. In a chamber above the main hall is said to lie a treasure of

THE MOTHER OF CITIES

so fabulous a price that no man can estimate its worth : coins, gold ornaments, and every kind of precious stone, contributed during the centuries by devout pilgrims and stored there against a time of danger to the Mother of Cities. There is no guard over it. None is needed. Lying there in the palm of Islam's open hand it is safer than in any vault in Christendom.

There is but one door to the Kaaba, set about five feet from the ground. It is covered with beaten silver, elaborately embossed with figures and designs, and is rarely opened. Its key is in the hands of the Shabi, the hereditary Keeper of the Kaaba, the purest Arab in Mecca, into the keeping of one of whose ancestors Mohammed gave the key, promising him that the trust should remain in his family for ever, and there has been no break in the descent from father to son for thirteen hundred years.

Over the walls of the Kaaba is spread the kiswah, a cloth of black wool figured with a woven design and barred with a wide band of texts from the Koran, embroidered in golden thread. For centuries the right to provide a new covering at every pilgrimage season belonged to Egypt, and it was sent to Arabia in a decorated howdah, the mahmal, which was borne by a huge camel under an Egyptian escort, accompanied by a military band. The puritan Wahabbis regarded the music as idolatrous and resented Egyptian soldiers marching through Arabia, and during the pilgrimage of 1926 they stoned the escort, which fired on them. The personal intervention of Ibn Saud saved the situation, but the diplomatic differences which ensued lasted for ten years. During that time the cloth was manufactured in Mecca, and it was a Meccan kiswah which Chale saw covering the

Kaaba ; but since his visit the differences between the two countries have been settled. The kiswah is again to be supplied every year by Egypt, but the escort will remain in Jeddah until the end of the pilgrimage.

Just as all roads in Mecca lead to the Haram, so in the Haram each broad causeway leads to the Kaaba, which itself is surrounded by a wide circle of white marble paving, the mataf, and enclosed by little posts and railings which form a barrier at all times save when public prayers are taking place.

Chale and Munirah followed their matawif along the causeway which led from the Bab-es-Salam gate, past the high golden-roofed pulpit from which the Imam conducts Friday prayers, to the Makam Ibrahim, a small cupola supported on iron pillars, where tradition has it Abraham stood while directing the rebuilding of the Kaaba. It is also the praying-station of the Shafi school; the other three schools have theirs elsewhere.

The matawif instructed them in their religious duties, and then saying the words "Bismillah ar-Rahman ir-Rahim"—"In the name of God, the most Merciful, the most Beneficent," they stepped on to the marble pavement with the right foot, and made their way towards the corner of the Kaaba in which is fixed the Black Stone. They joined the throng of pilgrims who were walking round the House of God, keeping it always upon their left, and repeated after the matawif, "All praise to God and contempt upon the devil," and a long chant as they followed him.

Above the Kaaba hundreds of pigeons were wheeling. Chale noticed that none ever perched upon the roof, and their guide told him that they never did so. When the

THE MOTHER OF CITIES

Wahabis attacked Mecca under Ibn Saud the pigeons had flown to Jeddah, he said, and had not returned to the Holy City until peace had been established.

At each corner of the Kaaba a different ritual must be performed. First they came to the Iraq Corner, then passed outside the semi-circular Wall of Hatym. At the Sami Corner they threw up their hands, crying, "Bismillah-i, Allah-u-Akbar"—"In the name of God, indeed God is greatest."

The chanting swelled to a crescendo, as the pilgrims, lost to all earthly cares, worked themselves up to a fervour of religious elation. Within the Wall of Hatym were some very devout pilgrims, prostrate in attitudes of supplication, with their faces touching the ground for hours at a time.

As Chale and Munirah passed the Yemeni Corner and turned towards the fourth the excitement of the pilgrims increased, for they were approaching the sacred Black Stone. Many Muslims believe that this stone (possibly a meteorite which fell upon the plain in ages past) came from Paradise, when it was pure white: and that now it is black because it has absorbed the sins of the pilgrims who kiss its surface. It is said to be the only relic of the original building, which Abraham used as the foundation-stone when he rebuilt the temple by God's command. There is another tradition that Gabriel gave it to Abraham.

It stands about five feet from the ground, and is set deep into the wall, horizontally, surrounded by a protecting silver mount elaborately chased. It is irregular in shape, but worn smooth by the touch of innumerable generations of pilgrims. The kissing of the stone was

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

questioned by one of Mohammed's followers, who asked him if it was right for them to continue the practice. He answered by addressing himself to the stone: "Thou art but a stone which can do neither harm nor good," and kissed it himself. His answer displays his sagacity in allowing his people to preserve a custom which did no harm and brought solace and healing to their troubled souls, so that to this day every pilgrim kisses the stone at least once during his seven circuits of the Kaaba, believing it to have the power of giving divine inspiration. Even the Wahabbis, to whom the worship of tombs and of Islamic saints is abhorrent, find no idolatory in this simple act, and the Black Stone stands to-day, as it has stood for centuries, as the one concrete object of reverence (but not of worship) in the Islamic faith, the one tangible symbol of the Ancient House set up for the worship of the invisible and indivisible God.

As Chale and Munirah approached the stone the tide of pilgrims moved faster, and the crush became greater. Then came a rush as each strove to thrust his way to the stone. Beside it stood a Wahabbi policeman, armed with a stick with which he did not hesitate to belabour those who, having kissed the stone, would not withdraw their lips from it, religious ecstasy making them oblivious to exhortations and even to a smart crack upon the head.

The matawif, however, led them past the concourse round the stone, and they began their second circuit, stopping at each corner, as before, to recite a prayer. On their seventh circuit the crowd before the Black Stone was as dense as before; but this time they could not pass it by. They had a terrible struggle to avoid being swept away. Munirah clung tight to Chale's robe, panic-stricken but

THE MOTHER OF CITIES

resolute. The emotional fervour grew more and more intense. They fought their way to it—and even in the crush and excitement there was no ill feeling—and kissed it. Munirah clung to it in exaltation for a few moments, until Chale drew her away.

They said two prayers, facing the Black Stone, and when they passed on to the silver door of the Kaaba for the final rites they found it was standing open. A rich Indian had given a present to the Keeper of the Key to let him enter, the matawif said, and now the door was open to give the pilgrims the benefit of the gift.

Many Muslims will not enter the Kaaba, believing that its sanctity is such that they would be blinded if they looked towards the roof, but some pilgrims, particularly Indians, were fighting like lions to get in. Chale himself, and Munirah too, felt reluctant to enter the holy building. Their emotion was already so great that they feared they might break down. Instead, they stopped before the door and recited the Fatihah, the opening chapter of the Koran, which Chale had first said with Imam Mulana in Singapore :

“ In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Master of the Day of Requital. Thee do we serve, and thee do we beseech for help. Guide us in the right path, the path of those to whom thou hast shown grace, not of those who earn thy wrath, or of those who go astray.”

After saying the Fatihah they exercised the pilgrims' right to make one request of God, raising their hands in solemn supplication. Both prayers, Chale told me, were granted.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

They made their way to the Makam Ibrahim, and completed the ceremony of the tawaf by performing a prayer of two prostrations. Then they went to the Well of Zem Zem which stands close by. In Muslim annals its origin goes back to the time when at Sarah's behest Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness which the Old Testament calls Beersheba. Biblical maps place Beersheba west of the Dead Sea, but Muslims believe the country through which Hagar wandered to be the district wherein Mecca stands. But with this difference Muslims accept, in its essentials, the simple and beautiful story told in the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Genesis:

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow-shot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.

And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

That well the Muslims believe to be the well of Zem Zem, just as they believe that the Arab race is sprung

THE MOTHER OF CITIES

from Ishmael, the archer, and the wife his mother took for him from out of the land of Egypt.

The well is protected by a stone building lined within with coloured marble, and the attendants draw up the water in sheepskin buckets, such as are used throughout Arabia, by means of a creaking wooden lever. Once an engine was installed to draw the water more quickly, but it soon broke down and was removed, the pilgrims saying that it could not be God's will that a contrivance invented by the infidels should be used.

On one occasion an Indian, in a state of religious fervour, threw himself into the well, and a diver had to be brought from Jeddah to recover the body. The diver found that the well was fed by three separate streams. When the water comes to the surface it is slightly warm and has a pungent odour.

Zem Zem water is usually drunk after performing the tawaf ceremonial, although this is optional. But Chale and Munirah were both anxious to taste it, and each secured some from the water-bearers who stood round the well, handing it out in small cups of engraved white metal, each one serving a different racial group and receiving a tip in return. There are many poor persons who sleep in the Haram and live entirely on this water, which provides them with drink and nourishment. All Meccans believe that a man can maintain life solely by drinking the water, because of its divine properties.

The water was insipid, they found, but gave them a glow inside. It had aperient qualities, and Chale had heard that it cured skin diseases when externally applied. Mindful though he was of the niat he had made in Singapore, he could not make a trial of it while wearing the ihram:

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

that must wait until his return from the Plain of Arafat.

Leaving the Haram, they now set off for the traditional place, between two hills named Safar and Marwa, where Hagar in her distraction ran seeking water for her son. This is now a cobbled street known as Masa, starting from a rocky cul-de-sac and extending to another about half a mile away. It is lined with shops and coffee-houses, and the pilgrim who performs the ceremony, known as the Sa-i, must walk from one end to the other seven times, repeating the prayers after the matawif. At one point, indicated by a stone pillar, he must run with short steps, moving his arms up and down, till he comes to another marked spot: this is symbolical of his realization of how Hagar ran in her agony of mind seeking water for her son.

Having completed the Sa-i, the final obligation of the lesser pilgrimage, Chale and Munirah hurried back to Getan's house to make ready for the exodus to the Plain of Arafat.

Chapter XIII

THE PLAIN OF ARAFAT

CHALE and Munirah had been up at daybreak that morning. They had left Jeddah at eleven o'clock, reached Mecca by two, and finished the tawaf of arrival soon after four. So they had already had a day full of action and emotional excitement; yet they had no sense of exhaustion as they set off for the Plain of Arafat. The elation of the spirit had conquered the weakness of the flesh.

Munirah went with Getan's wife and his female relatives and slaves in a covered lorry, Chale with Getan himself and other men in an open one. They left the city, passing the great cemetery of Maala on the left, and the palace of Ibn Saud on the right: Chale noticed that it was strongly fortified and large enough to house the King's large family and numerous retinue when he was away from Riadth. Then they turned east into a valley of barren hills with lumpy boulders protruding from their sides, through a deep ravine blasted by King Hussein to improve the pilgrims' way, and emerged into more open country, with higher hills on either side, halting for a while at the little desert town of Mina, where many pilgrims had stayed the preceding night.

The exodus to the plain was in full spate. The wide sandy track stretching beyond Mina was little more than a series of ruts thronged with an endless stream of camels, donkeys, ponies, lorries, cars, and pilgrims on foot. The camels were in caravans and were tied to one another,

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

some groaning and weeping as they loped along, others silent and dignified. They were loaded with suit-cases, sacks of rice and sugar, Japanese baskets, kerosene-oil tins, mattresses wrapped in rattan mats from the East Indies, coloured rugs from Turkey and Afghanistan, camel-hair sleeping-mats, bundles of stinking dried fish, coffee-pots, and baskets of protesting fowls, and even frying-pans and cooking-pots, which were tied to the camels' tails and clanked with the beasts' every movement.

Some pilgrims, either because they had been unable to secure camels for their transport, or from preference, rode donkeys, and loaded their goods and chattels on others.

Beyond these baggage trains were the riding-camels, with their passengers lying at ease in the canopied litters slung on either flank. Sweeping past them went racing-camels, proud, long-striding creatures, richly caparisoned and decked with elaborate trappings of coloured tassels, each ridden by a Bedouin sitting bolt upright in a long black robe, with his wife mounted behind him. They outdistanced even the cantering Arab ponies and the ancient Ford cars which thrust their way along, blowing their horns unceasingly, while beside the road Bedouin shepherds were driving flocks of sheep, soon to be sacrificed in atonement for pilgrims' sins.

It was a noisy cavalcade, the grunts of the camels mingling with the braying of the donkeys, the whinnies of the ponies, the bleating of the sheep, the raucous complainings of the fowls, and the hooting of the cars: and above all that din rose the chanting of the hymn to God, "Labayyk Allahumma labayyk," sometimes singly, sometimes in chorus.

THE PLAIN OF ARAFAT

Chale knew that he was looking upon the strangest procession in the world. He thought how every year for thirteen centuries, during the Muslim lunar month of Zul Hijah, the pilgrimage had taken place. Only the numbers had varied: many in years of prosperity; fewer when (as now) the times were hard, but always in tens of thousands. Nothing but the cars and lorries linked the scene to the twentieth century. The dress of the pilgrims had never changed, nor the hymn they chanted as they rode or trudged along the dusty track. Wars and the menace of wars had never stopped that annual exodus to the Holy Plain. The voices of kings, of emperors, of dictators, fell but faintly upon the ears of those who responded to the voice of God. No sound of laughter or of casual speech disturbed the serenity of the intense atmosphere created by the concentration of thousands of human minds upon one destination and one glorious purpose. Chale told me that as he passed along that ancient highway he felt that the passage of the mighty concourse of white-clad figures was an earthly comparison, small yet representative, of the ultimate passing of the souls of mankind along the highway leading to the throne of God on the Day of Judgment to come.

A few miles from Mina they reached Muzdalifah, where lies a lonely, open mosque, and soon afterwards passed through the narrow rocky passage which opens out into the great Plain of Arafat.

The plain is fifteen miles north-west of Mecca, enclosed by a circle of rugged hills. On the east rises the cone-shaped Mount Arafat (also called Jebel Rahma, the Hill of Mercy), about two hundred feet high, its summit surmounted by a granite pillar, to mark the spot where the

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Prophet addressed his followers on his last pilgrimage; from its middle gushes a spring of clear water, the Siti Zobeidah, which is led by an aqueduct encircling the hill, and thence to Mecca, forming the main water-supply of the city.

The plain itself is uncultivated and, except at the time of the pilgrimage, uninhabited. It is treeless and open, spread beneath the eternal sunshine like a vast brown praying-mat. If it be true that matter can receive charges of human emotion then the Plain of Arafat must be more deeply charged with holiness than any other wild place known to man, for it is consecrated to the worship of God. There is no place comparable to it on the surface of the earth.

As the lorry rounded a bend in the road the sun was setting behind the western segment of the encircling hills in a mass of gold. The sky was a clear delphinium blue. Below, spread out before them, lay the plain. The scene it presented was unforgettable. The whole of that vast circle was brimming with white-clad figures and tents of every colour and of every shape, each with a flag indicating the pilgrims' nationality. There were thousands upon thousands of them, all hired in Mecca, where they are stored for the use of pilgrims every year. As Chale gazed down there came to his ears, through the still evening air, the strangest sound he had ever heard: the murmurous babble of three hundred thousand voices, blended from every language spoken in the Muslim world, and sweetened by distance into a delicious harmony.

As they drew nearer a single phrase would shoot up like a fountain from the level surface of the sound: "Labayyk Allahumma labayyk," to be echoed back sonorously by

THE PLAIN OF ARAFAT

the pilgrims advancing along the road. Then Chale began to identify the cries of the animals, particularly the bleating of the sheep, which had been driven on to the plain in readiness for the morrow's sacrifice.

When they reached the level of the plain they found themselves in the midst of fervent activity. Pilgrims were busily erecting their tents, tethering their camels and their donkeys, chattering with the Bedouins who had driven flocks of sheep from all over Arabia to provide sustenance for that strange and mighty gathering. There was no control, no deliberate organization; and yet there was no chaos. The pilgrims set up their tents where they pleased, but there was no bickering about the sites. Each group scrupulously made its own sanitary arrangements, scooping hollows in the sandy soil.

Getan's tents had been sent on ahead, and were lying on the ground guarded by his slaves. Every one lent a hand in their erection. First the tents for the women were put up, that they might have seclusion from the crowd. Then the sleeping-tents and two large marquees under which the whole party of over one hundred men and women could eat and pray.

As they were pegging down the last ropes came the call to the evening prayer. A hush fell upon the assembled multitude. Men and women disappeared into their tents, ranged themselves in lines behind some elder expert in leading prayers, fell upon their knees facing Mecca, and began their devotions.

Then came the evening meal. Getan's slaves cooked in the open, and handed into the tent a huge iron cauldron full of boiled mutton and rice, which was tipped out on to an enormous brass tray placed on the ground in the

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

centre of the tent. Chale and the fifty men who made up Getan's party sat round, helping themselves with their right hands, and saying, "Bismillah ar-Rahman ir-Rahim." An hour's discussion on theological subjects followed. Then, tired out, Chale sought his sleeping-tent, which he shared with six other pilgrims.

He was up before dawn next morning, and, having performed a minor ablution, joined in the daylight prayer. He spent the forenoon strolling about the plain, observing, meditating, greeting acquaintances.

He passed Ibn Saud's tent and saw the King pacing slowly to and fro outside it with one of his ministers, dressed, like every other pilgrim, in the simple ihram. He knew that in Islam there was no distinction of class. He knew that in a mosque the King had no special place, but would worship beside the humblest slave. All that he had accepted as true, but the sight of the King's stalwart figure, clad in the symbol of Islam's equality, made a profound impression on him and brought home to him that, autocrat though Ibn Saud might be, in the place of God he mingled with his people on equal terms.

He returned to the tent for the midday prayer. A meal followed, and as the afternoon advanced the excitement began to grow. On all sides pilgrims were reciting individual prayers. The chanting became more exultant. An imam mounted on a camel passed the tents, preaching a sermon, but the press was so great that Chale could not get near him.

As soon as the afternoon prayer was over the pilgrims came streaming from their tents into the sunlight, the women secluded from the gaze of men by canvas screens. Plucking off the upper garment of their ihram,

THE PLAIN OF ARAFAT

they began waving them wildly to the sky, and from three hundred thousand voices rose the tumultuous chorus :

“ Here am I, O God, at thy service!
Here am I, thou hast no partner, here am I!
Verily all praise and grace and kingship are thine!
Thou hast no partner, here am I! ”

Then came the ceremonial liberation of such slaves as the pilgrims had brought with them for that purpose to the plain. Amid the excitement Chale thought of the old negress and almost wished he had bought her after all, so that he might have shared in the ceremony and acquired merit. But he had little time for reflection. There came a stir in the camp as the King’s bodyguard, mounted on camels, preceded the royal car, which halted at the foot of Mount Arafat. The King, accompanied by an imam, climbed to the summit. His tall form was silhouetted against the sky as he stood by the granite pillar, but the words of the imam, as he preached the sermon which brought the ceremony of the pilgrimage to an end, could not reach the great multitude below.

When he had made an end the pilgrims once again fervently chanted the Labayyka. They became tense with anticipation. The great moment was at hand. While the chanting was at its height, while the pilgrims were swaying in supplication, while the ihram were fluttering like the white banners of an army, out of the valley swept that mysterious wind of which Chale had so often heard : the hot whirlwind of Arafat.

He saw it coming : a vast pillar of whirling sand, dark against the blue sky. It was awe-inspiring, and while it lasted seemed to fill that plain with awful desolation, as if

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

to teach those present the difference between Hell and Heaven. The chanting and supplications increased in fervour, and the pilgrims became overwhelmed by an ecstasy of elated frenzy as the whirlwind came racing and raging over the plain with a menacing, droning sound. As it hit the tents it laid most of them flat, as though some immense unseen steam-roller were tearing over them. Others flapped like the sails of a ship at the mercy of a hurricane. The crack of snapping poles and the ripping of canvas added to the uproar.

Most of the pilgrims remained indifferent to the storm, and when their waving ihrams were twitched from their hands they remained chanting their hymn of praise, bending their half-naked bodies to the stinging sand. Some leapt to seize their tent-ropes before they were hurled away. Others ran to the panic-stricken beasts. Camels and donkeys were stampeding. Terrified sheep came careering through the crowd. The women set up a shrill yelling behind their screens. On every side men were groping, gasping, falling, their hair awry, their bodies buffeted by the wind and smitten by the sand. "It was like a gigantic madhouse," Chale said.

Three times the wind stormed round the plain; then died away with as little warning as it had come. For a few moments an intense calm fell; even the animals were still and quiet. Then, from the pilgrims, went up a great sigh of content and satisfaction; one massed murmur of thankfulness to God. The climax of the pilgrimage was over. The departing whirlwind had borne with it the sins of three hundred thousand souls. The fiercer the wind, as every pilgrim believed, the stronger the purge. Those who had been hurt by flying debris were the happiest of all,

THE PLAIN OF ARAFAT

accepting their wounds as meet punishment for sin in the joyful assurance that their souls were purified.

"Truly God is compassionate to his people, brother," said an Afghan to Chale, making no attempt to staunch the blood that was streaming down his thigh. "This year he blessed us with a mighty wind. See the cut I had from an iron peg! It has been as good as seven pilgrimages! Allah-u-Akbar!"

I questioned both Chale and Munirah very closely about this strange phenomenon. Both assured me that they and the pilgrims with them had known it would come. Every man and woman on the plain had been expecting it. It always came. For thirteen hundred years it had come, punctually at the same hour, on the day of the pilgrimage, and upon that day only. Other Muslims have corroborated their statement, although some have qualified it by saying that there have been years when the wind has not come, but all agreed that, with those exceptions, it is a regular annual event. Whether there is any natural explanation, I do not know. The Muslim seeks none, firm in his belief that the wind is sent by God upon the appointed day.

A few minutes after the wind had passed every one began to pack and load the animals. The great multitude streamed across the plain the way they had come. They had arrived in haste: they left in leisure, trooping away, still in their ihram, still unwashed, with the sand clinging to their hair and bodies, but grateful and content.

While Getan's lorry was being loaded Chale stood apart and watched them go. Peace was in his heart. His spirit was tranquil and appeased. Even so his mind could not detach itself from the scene before him, and he marvelled

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

at it. All he had once believed he now knew to be true. Islam was the greatest democracy in the world, in practice as well as theory. Kings and princes, rich and poor, people of every colour and of every race, met as equals, not only on the Plain of Arafat, but in their lives beyond the confines of Arabia. Could that vast brotherhood be anything but a power for good? Could it not be used to a greater purpose in the modern world? He thought of Christian Europe with the Powers at each other's throats; in every country strikes and internal conflicts; villages rent with dissension and rank with gossip, families at loggerheads. Why were Christians so beastly to one another, when the teaching of their Master had been peace and brotherhood? That had been Mohammed's teaching too. Muslims made that teaching part of their lives: the essential part. How was that? Was it that they kept Mecca, and the thought of all Islam stood for, always before their eyes, and made it a vivid and unfading pattern for their lives?

He heard a movement beside him, and turned to see the Afghan with the gashed thigh.

The Afghan stretched out his lean brown hand towards the departing multitude.

“See, brother,” he said. “Truly those thousands that God has blessed may be likened to hens’ eggs newly laid!”

Chapter XIV

THE FEAST OF THE HAJIS

THE sun was setting by the time Getan and his pilgrims left the plain for Muzdalifah to prepare for the ultimate rites of the Haj.

The origin of this ceremony is the Muslim tradition that the hill upon which Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son was above Mina, not in the land of Moriah, far to the north, as related in the Book of Genesis. The Muslim version also differs from the Biblical account in maintaining that it was Ishmael, not Isaac, whom God commanded Abraham to sacrifice.

Again, according to the Book of Genesis, Abraham kept his son in ignorance of his purpose until the last moment, so that the boy questioned Abraham :

Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.

But the story in the Koran tells how the boy shared with his father in submission to the will of God, and relates that when he had reached the age to work Abraham said to him :

“O my son, verily I have seen in a dream that I should offer thee in sacrifice: consider, therefore, what thou seest right.” He answered, “O my father, do what thou art commanded; thou shall find me, if it please God, one of the patient.”

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Muslim tradition has it that Abraham saw his vision on the eighth night of the month of Zul Hijah, and to assure him that it was not sent by Satan (as he was inclined to suspect), the same vision was repeated on the following night, when he knew it to be from God, and again on the third night, when he resolved to obey it. Hence these three days of the pilgrimage are sometimes called the Day of the Vision, the Day of Knowledge, and the Day of the Sacrifice.

Muslims believe that while Abraham was making his way to the place of sacrifice with Ishmael and Hagar, Satan tempted him, whispering in his ear, "Abraham, why should you sacrifice your beloved son?" Abraham refused to listen, and then Satan tempted Hagar and Ishmael in turn, but without effect. At each of the three spots where the temptations were made is a pillar of stone, set up as a symbol of Satan, surrounded by a ditch. It is every pilgrim's duty to cast seven small stones at each of these pillars, on successive days, and these pebbles must be procured from the valley near Muzdalifah.

Darkness had fallen by the time Getan and his people reached the village and left the car. Munirah joined Chale, and together they went in search of the stones. It was an eerie scene. The moon was shining, and as they approached the valley they saw thousands of pilgrims, still clad in their white ihram, wandering to and fro in silence, scanning the ground for stones, bending to pick one up, or scratching the soil with their fingers. Now and again one of them would strike a match. But the extraordinary thing was that not a word was spoken. Every one was too intent to speak. The only sounds were the shuffling of innumerable feet, and an occasional grunt of satisfaction.

THE FEAST OF THE HAJIS

In the bright moonlight they looked like a company of ghosts intent upon some mysterious mission.

When Chale and Munirah had each collected twenty-one stones they joined Getan's party again, and all went on to Mina, arriving after midnight. They washed their stones in water seven times, and flung seven of them at the pillar known as the Great Devil, Shaitan-el-Akbar, crying as each stone was thrown, "In the name of God, God is greatest."

Having completed the ceremony they repaired to one of the barbers' shops, numbers of which were conveniently set up near by, where the tahallul, the ceremonial shaving of a tuft of hair from the head, was performed in return for a small present of alms. This absolved them from further obligation to wear the ihram, the state of consecration was terminated, and they were free to bathe and to enjoy the comforts of normal life. They made their way to the house Getan had in Mina, Munirah sleeping in the women's room, and Chale with the men, postponing their formal purification till after they had slept.

The next day was the annual Feast of the Hajis, and they awoke to find preparations in full swing. Mina is only a small town, but during the days of the Haj it is packed with pilgrims, and those who have no accommodation camp on the outskirts in their tents. Early in the morning they came streaming into the long street, thronging the Javanese coffee-shops or buying snacks and souvenirs from the strolling pedlars. But it was a very different crowd from that which had left the Plain of Arafat on the previous evening. Not a single pilgrim was wearing the ihram. All had completed the rites and purified their bodies with a complete ablution. They were now

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

free to enjoy the festival and were dressed in their best clothes, on their heads brand-new coloured turbans, symbols of the honoured title of haji, to which they had the right to the end of their days.

The street was colourful with bright Javanese sarongs and Indian cloths; the Arabs were wearing the mishlah and igal again, and the Egyptians were resplendent in their long picturesque robes. The whole East seemed to be collected in that town. Every one was beaming with delight, saluting his friends with happy compliments, and visiting their houses or camps to drink tea and eat sweetmeats. Lifelong enemies from East Indian villages or Moroccan towns suddenly became friends at Mina, their differences melted by the glow of the brotherhood of Arafat.

As Chale sauntered about greeting acquaintances, he looked at them aghast. So intent had he and Munirah been in getting off to Arafat, so hurried had their few hours in Mecca been, that neither had given thought to the Hajis' Feast, and no one had reminded them that they would need fine clothes, so that they had nothing to wear but the ihram among this gay and laughing crowd of happy people.

For himself, Chale would not have greatly minded. He was never one to worry overmuch about clothes, and he would have been just as content to spend the day in his ihram as in his mishlah. But he dreaded to think of Munirah's feelings. To a woman such things mattered. Mattered terribly. He cursed himself for having clean forgotten to bring her clothes. Since leaving Jeddah it was his one bad bit of staff work. He hated to think of her disappointment, of her pleasure spoilt, of the finery that lay packed in a suitcase at Mecca.

THE FEAST OF THE HAJIS

As soon as he realized the embarrassment she might be suffering among the Arab women, whom he knew to be most critical of one another's appearance, Chale asked the doorkeeper of the harem if he might speak to Munirah. As he had feared, she was almost in tears. So steadfast, so patient under the real trials of life, her woman's heart could not bear the thought of mingling in her pilgrim's dress with the others arrayed for festival. Her face would be black with shame, she kept saying. She could not meet all those women. She must hide all day. In her ihram she would be as timid as a deer which enters a village. Chale was dreadfully sorry for her. After all she had been through he hated the thought that for her the pilgrims' great day of release and happiness must be spoilt. But there must be a way out. He promised her that he would do his best.

He found Getan and asked what was to be done. The old sheikh was understanding and, as always, kind. He would take them to Mecca in his car, so that they could conclude the rites of the pilgrimage by performing the tawaf of departure from Arafat, fetch the clothes, and then return to spend the rest of the festival in Mina. They could stone the remaining two pillars that evening and the following night.

Munirah was happy again when Chale told her this, and they set off to Mecca in Getan's car. The road was thronged with thousands of uxorious Bedouins who had stoned the first pillar and were hurrying back with their wives to perform the final rites so that they might that night enjoy the embraces that had been denied them while they wore the ihram. Sex is of such account in the daily life of Arabs that they suffer more from being

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

deprived, even for religious reasons, of relations with their wives than men of other races. They had satisfied their spiritual longings upon the Plain of Arafat, and now it was the natural order of their lives that they should satisfy their physical appetites when they got back to Mina.

Custom prescribes that when pilgrims return to Mecca from Mina they must perform the tawaf of departure from Arafat round the Kaaba before setting about any private affairs, so that on their arrival Chale and Munirah, having changed their ihram for ordinary clothes at Getan's house, went straight to the Haram. The marble pavement round the Kaaba was even more densely thronged than before, and hundreds of Bedouins, feverish with excitement after the pilgrimage to Arafat, were swarming round the Black Stone. Six times Chale and Munirah passed it by, hoping that the press of Bedouins about it might grow less, but on their seventh circuit they found it even greater than before. Holding Munirah by the arm Chale thrust into the crowd. He was buffeted and jostled on every side : there was no hostility, but the Bedouins' intense desire to reach the stone rendered them regardless of any other consideration.

"They fought like demons to get there," Chale told me. "The most determined people in the world!"

So fierce was the struggle that his mishlah was torn from him. He grabbed it before the crowd could trample it underfoot and clutched it to him while he elbowed his way into the seething mass, Munirah clinging to him, terrified but intent. It needed all his strength to force his way through, and even when they got near the stone they could not reach it because a Bedouin in front of them

THE FEAST OF THE HAJIS

was clinging to the silver mount and refused to move. He paid no heed to the commands of the guard, and seemed oblivious to pain when the policeman began to belabour him over the head and shoulders with his stick. Crack! Crack! Down came the stick upon the Bedouin's skull; but he clung on, his lips to the stone, gripping the mount with both hands. At last the policeman dislodged him. There was a rush for the next place, but the policeman held the shouting Bedouins off so that Munirah could take her turn. By this time she too had caught the frenzy of the crowd and clung to the stone with such fervour that Chale had difficulty in getting her away after he had kissed the stone himself.

They fought their way through the crowd again, drank Zem Zem water, and then performed the Sa-i ceremony. Even in the street of Masa the crowd was so great that Munirah had to hold Chale's mishlah all the time they were running to and fro, and after the seventh journey they were so exhausted that they sought rest in one of the ice-cream shops that lined the street. Then they returned to Getan's house, where Chale changed into his best mishlah, and Munirah dressed herself in her finest silken coat and sarongs, radiant once more and happy that she could take her place with the other women in celebrating the Feast of the Hajis.

On their return to Mina she joined the women in Getan's house while Chale set off to stone the second pillar: Munirah could not go with him, since women must perform the ceremony at night. As he cast his seven pebbles he noticed that the ditch round the pillar was full of them: later they would be taken to the Haram at Mecca, to be added to the unpaved sections of the

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

courtyard, which is composed entirely of pebbles used in the stoning ceremony.

Above Mina he saw the hill where the Muslims believe Abraham took his son for sacrifice. On one side is a curiously shaped stone on which Abraham is said to have laid Ishmael's head, and near by is the little cave where Hagar hid because she could not bear to watch the sacrifice.

The Book of Genesis records that as Abraham raised his knife the Angel of the Lord commanded him not to lay his hand upon the boy :

And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns : and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

According to the Koran :

When they had submitted themselves to the divine will and Abraham had laid his son prostrate on his face, we called unto him, "O Abraham, thou hast verified the vision. Thus do we reward the righteous. Verily this was a manifest trial." And we ransomed him with a mighty victim.

The commentator Al Beidawi declares that before Abraham heard the voice of God he had drawn the knife with all his strength across the boy's throat, but had been miraculously prevented from hurting him ; and there is a tradition that as Abraham raised his knife he found the ram under his hand and Ishmael standing beside him. Some hold that the ram was the very same which Abel sacrificed to God, having been brought to Abraham from Paradise, and that its horns hung upon the waterspout of the Kaaba until they were removed by Mohammed himself, to destroy all temptation for idolatry.

As Chale walked back to Mina, pondering over the ver-

THE FEAST OF THE HAJIS

sions of that grand and ancient story, and particularly of the dramatic moment when Abraham had drawn his knife harmlessly across Ishmael's throat, a conversation he had had with Saleh about the adequacy of charms for invulnerability came into his mind.

An Arab in Jeddah had been sentenced to death, Saleh had told him: a few years previously, it had been. The criminal was led out to the place of execution, and bowed his head. The executioner brought his sword down upon the man's neck, but it rebounded from the flesh: he might have been trying to chop stone. The prisoner was examined, and every one was amazed to find that he had no wound. The skin was not even broken. The executioner tried again: with the same result. He became frightened. Another executioner was fetched, but was no more successful. The Arab was taken back to gaol.

"You can never kill me," he said, "unless it is my will to be killed. My life is protected by one of the most powerful charms ever prepared by man."

They searched him, but could find no charm.

"It is time for me to die," said the Arab. "Look! I will show you my charm!"

Taking a knife, he slit the skin of his forearm open. Inside was a charm with potent characters upon it.

"My father gave it to me when I was a child," he told them. "He said that no weapon could harm me so long as it remained beneath my skin. Now take it. Death is a black camel which kneels once to every man, and it has pleased God to send him to me now."

They took the charm from him and led him back into the sunshine. Once more the executioner swung his axe and severed the head at a single blow.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

That was Saleh's story; and under Chale's questioning he had stuck to it. He had seen the whole thing with his own eyes, he said. Chale did not doubt his word, but wished that he could see something of the kind himself. What he did see, however, was the sacrifice of animals which, for its justification, dates back to the days of Abraham, and is symbolical of the killing of the beast that is in every man before he can attain the pinnacle of spiritual perfection.

Most of the victims were sheep, but young camels, goats, and cattle were among them. A camel or a bull may be sacrificed either by one person or by seven jointly. The sheep cost four reals—about eight shillings—each, allowing for the sheikhs' commission on the deal, traffic in sacrificial animals being an important part of the sheikhs' income. Any number may be sacrificed by pilgrims wishing to acquire merit, but certain sacrifices are obligatory, such as penalties for having scratched the body while wearing the ihram, or for letting some hairs fall from the head, or for wearing extra garments. Chale sacrificed two sheep: one for a vest he had worn under his ihram and one for his money-belt. Munirah had to sacrifice three sheep, since for her the date of the pilgrimage had fallen at an unfortunate time in the month.

Pilgrims may kill their own sheep if they wish to, but neither Chale nor Munirah made their sacrifices in person. Chale had told Getan the number required and paid over the money, and Getan had made the necessary arrangements. There was no difficulty in finding victims, for hundreds of thousands of them had been driven in from all parts of Arabia.

The sacrifices were being made some distance from the

THE FEAST OF THE HAJIS

village. According to Muslim law every beast must have its throat cut. Heads, guts, bones, and whole carcasses strewed the ground, but the pilgrims' spiritual fervour made them blind to what others would have felt to be a ghastly scene. There was blood everywhere, and a sicken-ing stench. The bleating of the sheep drowned every other sound. Beggars and those who, as the Arabs said, were only alive because they were too poor to buy shrouds had assembled from miles around to share the meat. There was more than enough for all. They were waiting patiently to take what remained (after the best had been removed by the owners), or roasting joints over fires.

With the cries of the dying creatures in his ears, Chale turned his steps to the Mina post-office, a small stone building with a staff of ten Arab clerks. The place was swarming with pilgrims, many in a highly emotional state, struggling to send off telegrams. Those who could not write were dictating telegrams and letters to professional scribes, of many nationalities, some forty of whom were doing a brisk business. Chale sent off a telegram to Munirah's father, telling him that they had reached Mecca in safety and had performed the Haj.

He spent the rest of the day chatting and drinking coffee with the pilgrims from Sarawak : he had no difficulty in finding their tent, since it was flying a flag of red, yellow, and black : the Sarawak colours, but with the red and black Christian symbol of the St George's Cross (which is part of the State colours) displayed in a different design on the yellow ground, the idea being to be true to the Rajah's colours while eliminating any suggestion of loyalty to the Christian Cross.

On the third day the stoning of the third pillar took

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

place, and next morning the great exodus from Mina began. Chale and Munirah watched it from Getan's house.

It was a strange contrast to the procession from Mecca. Then every one had been fervent and intense, lustily chanting the Labayyka and clad in the simple ihram. Now the pilgrims were gay and happy, and dressed in their finery. Some had Chinese umbrellas of oiled paper to protect them from the sun; others carried sticks over their shoulders with bundles attached. The camels were decked out in coloured trappings. Tripping donkeys, Arab ponies, and racing-camels passed the halt and the blind. There was the same crowding and buffeting, and invariable good humour. Then came a string of camels ridden by Wahabbi police, each with an arrested thief seated at his back with hands bound behind him.

Hour after hour the procession went by, the repeated "Euh! Euh!" of the camel-drivers rising above the murmur of conversation. Then came the retinue of the King: six hundred police, on foot, with a train of ponies, donkeys, and camels. The King himself was in his car, with his scarlet bodyguard on either side, followed by his wives and children in open cars, with coloured cloths arranged to seclude them from the public gaze. Behind them rode Emir Feisal mounted on a magnificent grey Arab stallion.

In the afternoon Getan's party joined the throng and returned to Mecca. There Chale and Munirah stayed in Getan's house for eleven days. There was much to do. First they went to the Well of Zem Zem, where Chale arranged for a kerosene-oil tin of the water to be sent to Getan's house. On his return he poured it over his head

THE FEAST OF THE HAJIS

and body, and two days later his skin trouble had vanished.

In payment of the vow he made in Singapore he bought a measure of lentils and flung them to the pigeons of Mecca, while Munirah distributed alms to the poor in the Haram, in fulfilment of her niat for safe arrival in the Holy Land.

One day Chale paid a visit to the slave market. He found it to be very far from his somewhat romantic conception, based on *The Arabian Nights*, in which Eastern merchants watched a succession of lovely and flimsily clad damsels paraded before them like mannequins, and bid keenly for the loveliest. He had some difficulty in finding the place at all, but at last, having been directed down a narrow lane, he entered a room full of people. He gathered that it was not a place of public sale, but merely a recognized rendezvous where owners who had slaves to sell could bring them on approval.

The slaves Chale saw in the room were mostly negroes or Yemenites from Southern Arabia. There were men, children with their mothers, and whole families. They sat in silence, attentively eyeing their prospective purchasers. There was no auction, but several dealers were doing business. The slaves seemed a poor lot, but looked happy, Chale thought. An Arab standing next to him told him that the best had been sold before the pilgrimage, for liberation on the Plain of Arafat.

Another day he took Munirah to a mosque at the summit of a hill named Jebel Kubeis, overlooking the city, where pilgrims call to their friends and relatives, bidding them follow to the Holy City in years to come. Munirah told me that she had a definite impression that she saw

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

her mother's form, and that therefore she would assuredly reach Mecca another day.

On their return they bought some pieces of candles from the Keeper of the Kaaba and some scent distilled from the blossoms of the apricot- and peach-trees of Taif, a mountain resort some twenty miles from Mecca: a heavy, incense-laden perfume which is used for sprinkling grave-clothes. The Shabi also has the privilege of selling portions of the previous year's covering of the Kaaba. The price worked out at about seven shillings a yard, and Munirah bought three yards of it to distribute among her friends on her return.

Then they bought some Zem Zem water, which is much appreciated all over the Muslim world, and it is believed that shrouds which have been dipped in it will withstand the fires of hell. Nearly every pilgrim takes back with him some of the water in bottles or in tins. There is a special industry in Mecca for lining the inside of kerosene-oil tins with wax, to prevent rusting, and when the tin has been filled it is soldered up. Chale and Munirah procured three tins in return for a small present.

Thus the days passed happily. Most pilgrims stay in Mecca as long as they can, which means as long as their money lasts. Some stay as long as seven years. Others, the lonely ones who have no ties in their own country, settle down in Mecca and earn their living by opening a shop, hoping to end their days there, for no greater beatitude can befall a Muslim than to die in Mecca.

Chale and Munirah might have stayed in Getan's house for months, for he would accept no payment beyond the eighteen pounds in gold which covered the journey to Mecca and Medina, all food and lodging, and pilgrim

THE FEAST OF THE HAJIS

taxes. He was genuinely glad to have them, for every one in Mecca knew their story. They had become public characters, and Getan had acquired much credit for helping them to overcome their difficulties. Day after day people had discussed whether they were genuine or not. Their case had figured in the Meccan newspaper. Now they had justified themselves, and every one was glad. God had accepted them, and the Arabs, to make up for their previous suspicions, did their best to keep them.

Chale had grown really fond of the old sheikh, without whose help he knew his chances of ever getting to Mecca would have been slight indeed.

Getan told him that on one occasion he had gone to Ibn Saud and said :

"There is one of my juma'ah who declares that his heart has been Muslim for six years, and I ask your Majesty to allow him to go to Mecca."

"I gave him an audience," said Ibn Saud. "He appeared to me to be a true believer. But what I cannot understand is why a man who has a religion should wish to change it for another."

"I have heard him say," replied Getan, "that during a time when he had a great sickness upon him he made a niat that if he were cured he would become a Muslim."

"That explains everything," said Ibn Saud. "Now I can understand."

Getan and his family showed Chale and Munirah much kindness, and when Chale began to inquire about the arrangements for going to Medina he found that such was the hospitality of the Arabs that it was going to be even harder to get out of Mecca than it had been to get in. Getan's invitations to stay on became almost

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

embarrassing. Time after time he promised to see about the car, but did nothing. At last Chale persuaded him that they must go, and he at once volunteered to accompany them to Medina.

Before they set out on the journey back to Jeddah Chale and Munirah went down to the Haram to perform the tawaf of farewell. They performed the usual rites, but had to recite special prayers, and when they left they walked backwards, their faces turned to the House of God.

Munirah was weeping quietly as they left the great mosque. Chale himself was overcome with emotion. Since leaving Jeddah he had passed through an intense personal experience, whose significance would remain with him until he died. The pilgrimage had taught him much: religious truths transformed into practical realities. He had seen for himself the effect of a code which in its essentials was ancient and yet ever new, which had a universal application to the spiritual needs of man and to his way of life with his fellow-men. He had seen for himself that it was possible for men of different races, different stations, different politics, to live side by side in amity. The whole time he had been on the pilgrimage he had seen no fighting, no brawls or quarrelling, no drunken men. He had been a member of a theocratic democracy, united in one faith, worshipping towards the same consecrated spot; a vast fraternity whose religion was as needful to their lives as their very breath, and more needful than their food or worldly ease, guiding their private thought and outward behaviour, making them gentle and forbearing to one another and content in praising God.

He began to dread emerging into the outer world.

Chapter XV

HOLY MEDINA

CHALE and Munirah left Mecca in Getan's car, an ancient Ford with an Arab chauffeur. The sheikh himself accompanied them, as he had promised. They procured the necessary passes, stayed in Jeddah long enough to have a meal, and pushed on towards Medina the same afternoon.

The holy city of Medina is 250 miles from Jeddah, and, thanks to Ibn Saud, the road is now safe for pilgrims. In Hussein's time banditry was rife, and the lawless Bedouins swooped down upon the lonely road to rob the defenceless wayfarers and to hold up the camel caravans, although there were occasions when compassion touched even their ruthless hearts.

Getan told Chale a story of two Malays who, during the reign of Hussein, had been living in Mecca, supported by the profits from their parents' rubber garden in Kedah. The fall in the price of rubber cut off their money, and they decided to walk to Medina. They set off with a few supplies provided by their friends, but before long fell in with a band of Bedouins who took from them everything they had. They walked on, starving and parched with thirst, until, when they were at the point of death, another party of robbers surrounded them. Seeing their condition, the Bedouin leader gave them new clothes and as much food as they could carry, so that they succeeded in reaching Medina at last.

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

But when they scented plunder the Bedouins were pitiless and did not stop at murder. Ibn Saud, seconded by Bin Brahim, the despotic Emir of Medina, met their ruthless marauding with no less ruthless punishment, with the result that to-day the road to Medina is as safe as the road to Mecca, and although for most it is a long and exhausting journey pilgrims can travel in security. Those who walk may be a month upon the way, carrying their food and baggage on their heads. Not a few of the old people die before they reach the city, for they must pass through a waterless country, and there are only two places where they can buy food. Even camels (whose hire, including pilgrim tax, costs five pounds in English gold) take eighteen days on the journey, and nowadays pilgrims who can afford the fare of seven pounds ten shillings go by lorry and reach Medina in three days.

Those who travel by motor must take their water with them, and half a dozen kerosene-oil tins full were stowed on the running-boards of Getan's car, together with enough petrol for the journey, since there are no filling-stations by the wayside.

The road was little more than a track, which passed through varied country, the coastal swamps giving place to sandhills, which in turn led to vast expanses of pebbly desert, broken by ranges of barren hills.

At one point Chale saw, not far from the roadside, a low sandy hillock covered with tiny piles of large pebbles. Getan told him that the spot was a favourite halting-place for the East Indian pilgrims, who were in the habit of invoking their relatives to come to the Holy Land and placing a pebble as they named each one. As the car passed on Chale saw that these little heaps extended

HOLY MEDINA

beyond the hill for miles on either side of the road, forming a vast and pious field of remembrance to those who had not yet had the good fortune to visit the Holy Land.

The road was almost lined by swarms of Bedouin women, covered from head to foot in long black robes with slits for their eyes. They came towards the pilgrims like great bats, stretching out their hands for alms and shouting "Halala! Halala!" Chale and Munirah flung them handfuls of small coins they had brought with them for the purpose, mindful of the Prophet's saying, "A person who asks you for charity is a gift for you from God," and as they scattered the coins they murmured the Muslim prayer, "O God, accept this from us, for surely thou art the Hearing, the Knowing."

They passed Bedouins selling water-melons, which were being eagerly bought by the thirsty pilgrims. Thus had times changed, thought Chale, even in changeless Arabia: the fierce robbers of the desert had abandoned their adventurous existence and made an honest, if less exciting, living by selling the produce of their primitive agriculture to the pilgrims they had previously plundered.

From time to time the Arab chauffeur had trouble with the car, which appeared to be suffering from rupture. It became clear that he knew as little about the insides of cars as Chale knew about the insides of camels. He would get out and tinker with it abstractedly, while Getan looked on, philosophically muttering "It will go again if God pleases," and when the Ford jerked forward again he leapt nimbly in, crying, "Thanks be to God!"

For two nights they camped under such abandoned shelters as they found beside the way. Their main

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

halting-place by day was Rabigh, a hamlet about half-way to Medina, with a police-station, a few huts, and two or three coffee-shops.

While Chale and Munirah were having a cup of coffee an Indian and an Egyptian came in and sat down near them. They were obviously men of some substance in their own countries, accustomed to drive their own cars on good metalled roads. It was clear that they were not enjoying their ride to Medina. They looked hot and battered. They glanced round, eyed Chale, and began talking in English.

"What a terrible road, man!" lamented the Indian. "If our Prophet (on whom be peace) were not buried at Medina, who would come to this wretched place? Discomfort on every hand. Our car broken, and now we are stuck here. I meant to sail for Bombay in five days, and now there is not a chance of it."

Chale was tickled. Do them good, he thought.

He rose, paid his reckoning, and as he and Munirah left the coffee-shop he bent down and whispered in English:

"There is an Arab saying, brother, that during a journey a man's character is weighed and revealed, and to complain of one's hardships, except to God, is a humiliation."

Before they could recover from their surprise he stalked out, and, since every Muslim must help another, went off to help their chauffeur mend the broken car.

Late in the afternoon of the third day the panting Ford climbed the last range of hills and ground its way into the oasis of Medina, which stretches for twenty miles like a fertile island in the sea of desert, planted with

HOLY MEDINA

orange-groves and date-palms, of which there are 132 varieties, some of the fruit being as much as three inches long. The Turks built a mighty wall round the ancient city, and as the car approached the gates Chale saw the towers rising from it and the tops of the minarets shining white and red and golden brown in the setting sun.

Since the War Medina has been isolated from the outside world. Chale saw the rusty lines of the railway which had once connected it with Damascus. Hussein forbade the use of engines in Arabia, and Ibn Saud's Wahabbis like them no better. A few, stark and forlorn, still stood upon the rails, near the dilapidated station. Since the Turks have gone the commercial importance of the city has declined, and the poverty is very great. The only trade is with Tarbu, and the inhabitants, like every one else in Arabia, depend mainly upon the pilgrims for their livelihood. But, as Chale was soon to find, even in her isolation Medina is a centre of culture in the Muslim world.

The city gates were closing as the car drove up. The guards paid no attention to the chauffeur's adjurations to let him through. The gates clanged to, and the car stopped with a jolt. Near by the wall was a coffee-house, where they might have slept, but it was full of Indians and Afghans, and Getan preferred to camp in the tents outside.

Chale, however, felt that he might as well use the lavatory. While looking for it in the dark he blundered into a room full of Afghan women, who at the sight of him began screaming for help. He was so flustered that for a moment he could not find the doorway again, and the uproar increased. It was a terrific rumpus, and finally

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

Chale shot out again like a rabbit bolting from a hole with a ferret after him, as he put it to me. But he was not to get off so easily as that. After him came the outraged husband of the ladies, bawling at him to stop and calling upon every one else in the place to seize him.

Chale turned and did his best to placate the man. He offered profound apologies. He had gone in completely by mistake. He had only been just inside the door. And it had been so dark that he had not seen the faces of the women.

That seemed to relieve the Afghan's mind.

"Whoso curses a man without cause makes the curse return upon his head," he observed amiably. "And God fills the heart of one who asks pardon."

"And he is most esteemed in the sight of God who pardons one that has injured him," rejoined Chale politely.

"A sincere repenter of faults is as one who has committed none," said the Afghan generously.

"And the wrath of the true believer lasts no longer than the time it takes him to adjust his turban," replied Chale, not to be outdone.

They parted on the best of terms.

Next morning, soon after the gates were opened, Chale and Munirah entered Medina. They left the car, and hired a springless trap drawn by an Arab pony, which took them through the streets at a spanking pace. Looking about him, Chale saw that there was little resemblance between the two holy cities of Arabia. Medina had not the sublime austerity of Mecca. Mecca was a city of prayer, not of luxury. Medina was more exotic. It had fine houses, wide streets, cleaner than those of Mecca.

HOLY MEDINA

Mecca was set in a desert, Medina in an oasis. Mecca was dry and arid; the air of Medina was like that of a sunny day in an English summer. And just as the Kaaba was the centre of Mecca, so was the great green dome of Mohammed's tomb (which surmounts the mosque) the centre of Medina: in one the ancient House of God, in the other the resting-place of his Prophet.

The trap took them to the house of Said Ibrahim Hamdi, Getan's agent in Medina and the hereditary keeper of the library. He made them welcome. Munirah was escorted, as usual, to the women's apartments. Chale was plied with food, and Ibrahim Hamdi kept asking him "What news?" as Arabs do when they are a little shy and there is a gap in the conversation. Munirah was treated with similar hospitality. She and Chale had heard much of the women of Medina, and she found them to be as lovely as rumour said: with fair skins, blonde hair, tiny noses, long eyelashes, and blue eyes. All Arab women have extraordinarily long eyelashes, but Munirah was lost in admiration at their blue eyes, the like of which she had never seen, except in faces of Europeans.

After she and Chale had performed their ablutions Chale said they would like to go at once to the mosque. Ibrahim Hamdi obligingly found them a guide who would instruct them in the ziarat, the correct procedure of paying respect at the various tombs. It was Friday, and a crowd of people were thronging the threshold of the mosque. There was an enormous place for stowing the shoes of those who entered, and near by were many stalls where food might be bought, and scent, of a fragrance different from that sold at Mecca. Before entering they

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

recited the Muslim prayer: "O God, forgive us our sins and open for us the doors of thy mercy."

The floor of the mosque was of coloured marble, with no carpets, and immense Turkish candelabra hung from the lofty roof. They made their way first to the tomb of Mohammed, which is enclosed behind the two magnificent gates of silver and wrought iron. The tomb and its gigantic dome, which protrudes like a great green bubble from the roof of the mosque, was built by the Turks. It stands upon a floor of marble, its sides engraved with scrolls in Arabic. It is the actual resting-place of the Prophet, whose bones have never been disturbed.

There is a story that an Arab who lived in a house near the mosque conceived the idea of getting possession of the Prophet's remains. With three confederates he made a tunnel from beneath his house towards the tomb. After three years' work they were reaching their objective, when a holy man in Medina had the plot revealed to him in a dream, with the result that the house was searched, and the impious purpose discovered.

The Wahabbis do not discourage pilgrims from paying their respects at the tomb of the Prophet, but they will not countenance any attempt to raise Mohammed and his disciples to the level of God. In this they do but follow the teaching of their master, who again and again declared that he was not divine, but only the Prophet of God. So that although pilgrims are permitted to salute the tomb they may not perform any act which approaches to adoration, and the police on guard inside the mosque see that this rule is kept. While Chale and Munirah were standing near, an Egyptian seized hold of the gates and kissed them, then prostrated himself before

HOLY MEDINA

the tomb. Instantly two of the police leaped upon him and carried him off.

Having made their salutations before the tomb, Munirah went to pray in that section of the mosque which is set aside for women. Chale had noticed that the mosque was full of beggars, and he saw one of them go up to her as she was prostrating herself in prayer and pester her for alms. When she took no notice the man shook her by the shoulder, holding out his hand. Chale went to a policeman to protest, and the man was dragged yelling from the mosque.

Pilgrims come to Medina for the express purpose of paying their respects not only at the tomb of Mohammed but at those of his relatives and disciples which are in the vicinity of the mosque or in the cemeteries outside the city walls. Here the Wahabbis have been far more drastic. When the Turks came to Arabia they had lost the simple austerity of Islam, and, having a passion for building, they erected tombs not only over the graves of the Prophet and his family, but over those of any holy man they could find, and these came to be worshipped just as effigies of the saints are worshipped in the Catholic Church. When the Wahabbis obtained control they determined to demolish every symbol of idolatry, and destroyed all the tombs they could find, relying for their authority on Mohammed's teaching that Muslim graves should be level with the ground. They even contemplated destroying the tomb of the Prophet, and Getan told Chale that when they began their work a huge black snake emerged from the tomb and frightened them away. Such was the story, and the tomb remains: doubtless because Ibn Saud and his advisers decided not

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

to risk outraging the popular feeling of the Muslim world.

In the great cemeteries, however, the Wahabbis have done their work thoroughly: there is not a tomb to be seen, only flat stone slabs with inscriptions to tell whose remains lie beneath. In some places only a few pebbles mark the graves.

Before Chale entered the first of these cemeteries outside Medina he and Getan stopped to recite the customary prayer:

“Peace be upon you, O dwellers in this place. If it pleases God we are about to meet you. We ask God for a blessing upon ourselves and you.”

As he passed through the gate in the wall which surrounded the cemetery Chale immediately became aware of a mysterious atmosphere. The starkness of the place gave it an intense melancholy: it was unrelieved by a single tree, or plant, or upstanding stone. Nothing but a bare garden of death, in which the spirits of the dead seemed to be hovering over their graves. The atmosphere was charged with a multitude of souls: the souls of unforgotten holy men long dead.

“It was thick with age,” Chale told me. “I felt as if I was pressing my way through a dark cloth. I can’t explain it in any other way. It was overwhelming. I had a job to breathe. I felt as if I was going to konk out. I got weaker and weaker. It was a stifled feeling, like you get from being in an overheated room. Yet it wasn’t hot. It was still quite early in the morning.”

He asked Getan if it was absolutely necessary to visit each of the graves: his one desire was to get through the ceremony before he collapsed.

HOLY MEDINA

"Yes, brother, you must salute each one," replied Getan gravely, regarding him intently.

Chale could see that the old man was thinking that he might fall dead unless he were a true believer. He did not learn until afterwards that the Muslims consider this visitation of the graves one of the greatest tests of faith, believing that no one who is not genuine can pass through it.

It was only with the utmost determination that Chale forced himself to pass on slowly from grave to grave with the other pilgrims. It took over two hours, and all that time the strange sensation of oppression never left him. He was certain that if he had been an impostor he would never have got through, and that his faith, never so intense as then, was like a spiritual armour which protected him.

All this time Munirah was standing with the other women on a hill which overlooked the cemetery. She was dressed in black, with a veil completely covering her face. She told me that through it she seemed to see the spirits of the dead moving to and fro over the graves. All the women with her were weeping. She herself could not restrain her tears. The profound stillness and melancholy of the place affected her so much that, as she put it, "her heart wanted to fall."

When she joined Chale at the gate of the cemetery as he came out she saw that his face was almost blue and that he was trembling and breathing heavily. He appeared completely exhausted, and could not speak. She was terrified.

She spoke of this quite frankly to me.

"For the first time I began to doubt if his heart was

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

truly Muslim," she said. "I was afraid that God was going to strike him dead. I wondered how I should get back to Sarawak all alone."

Chale leant against the wall. Munirah brought him some water. He drank it and felt better. They returned to Ibrahim Hamdi's house to rest.

He has assured me that this was the most profoundly moving experience he has ever had in his life. In the Haram at Mecca and on the Plain of Arafat he had been deeply stirred, but with triumphant exaltation. This was utterly different. It was as though the fingers of the dead disciples had reached down to the very depths of his being; as though God had been making a stern and rigorous examination of his soul. Even now he can speak of it only with emotion. It was clear to me that he had passed through a drastic spiritual test.

Later, when he and Munirah visited the other cemeteries which lie on the outskirts of Medina, he was able to preserve his equanimity. He was moved by the holiness of these sacred places but not to the same degree, even when they visited the grave of Saidina Hamza, Mohammed's uncle. The cemetery is some miles beyond the oasis, and they rode on donkeys, and made their salutations to the memory of the Prophet's relative, whose bones have lain in that lonely grave for thirteen hundred years. Another day they drove through the date-groves in little donkey carriages to the mosque of Saidina Hamza, and distributed alms to the crowds of beggars who gather there, and visited the well into which the Prophet is said to have dropped his ring, thereby charging the water with holiness.

There is a slave market in Medina, much like the

HOLY MEDINA

market at Mecca, but fewer and inferior slaves are sold there. Touts would approach Chale as he walked through the city and ask him if he would like to see a beautiful girl slave, "with no sores, and lovely, well-meated arms." Once, out of curiosity, he accepted the invitation, and the tout led him, with many injunctions not to reveal the way to anyone else, through a maze of lanes and alleys to a room where they sat down and drank coffee. Presently the slave-dealer called a girl in. She was heavily veiled, but uncovered herself at the dealer's command. Chale was not impressed. His experience at Jeddah had taught him what to expect. To the disappointment of the dealer no business was done.

Chale found more pleasure in the great library of which his host was the keeper. It was a large room built into the wall of the mosque, lined with shelves which contained the greatest literary treasures of the Muslim world, the collection of over a thousand years. There were no European books, and none in print. Every work was in manuscript on parchment or on hard, yellowed sheepskins covered entirely with characters, even on the legs. Some were bound in hide, many of them religious works which the script showed to have been written before the days of Mohammed. At the time of the Wahabbi invasion of the Hedjaz Ibrahim Hamdi had removed the whole collection to the cellars of his own house for safety.

Any Muslim may examine these volumes with the permission of the Librarian, and Chale spent many happy hours browsing among them. What he found made him long for more time to make a comprehensive examination of these precious documents, some of which, he could

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

see, were of great historical importance. He did not feel it advisable to question his host too closely, lest he should arouse suspicion, but he saw enough to be sure that there were works, completely unknown to scholars of the Western world, which might have shattering results on modern thought. He knew that Mohammed had acknowledged the divine authority of the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Gospels, but he was also aware that Muslims believe that they have undergone so many alterations and corruptions that, although originally true revelations of God, little credit can be given to the present copies in the hands of the Jews and Christians. A European traveller named Terry had been told that the Muslims had a version of the books of Moses, although he had never seen it. There was known to be an ancient Arabic version of the Psalms of David, widely differing from the accepted Psalter. Was that among Ibrahim Hamdi's treasures? It was a fascinating speculation. If so, it might be the most important unpublished document in the world: he felt that he would gladly search for years to find it. That library held all the most exciting possibilities of literary adventure that only the exploring mind of the scholar can appreciate: but Chale knew that such adventure—yet—was not for him. Some day he would return. Ibrahim Hamdi pressed him to. Then he might make a discovery that would startle the world.

He spent many hours discoursing with this gentle and courteous Arabian scholar, but on the day before he left Medina he met a man who was Hamdi's complete antithesis: Bin Brahim, the Emir of Medina.

Chale had heard much of this autocratic prince, whose

HOLY MEDINA

name had inspired terror in the hearts of the fierce Bedouins, and whose swift justice had pursued them until they had been glad to abandon their lawless ways and live at peace. Getan had described Brahim's method of dispensing the law, as he sat on his throne and abruptly sentenced a criminal to a hundred lashes, and proceeded with the next case while the man was being beaten beside him. Then he would break off his interrogation, turn to the slaves, and say "Enough," and continue the other case.

Chale was delighted when the Emir sent Ibrahim Hamdi, Getan, and himself an invitation to lunch. Contrary to his expectation, he found the Emir to be a simple, modest man, without any pompous ideas of his own importance. He lived not in a palace, but in an unostentatious house in the main street of the city. He had a lean face and a high forehead, and as he talked to his guests he kept turning his head and restlessly shifting his eyes from one to another of them.

He welcomed Chale courteously in the main audience hall of his house, and then asked abruptly :

"Why have you come to Medina?"

"To make my salutation at the tomb of the Prophet, upon whom be peace."

"That is well."

"It is indeed fortunate that we have been able to travel the long road from Jeddah to Medina without being molested in any way. This I know to be due to your Highness's wisdom and courage, and your ability to control the Bedouins under your hand."

"Your words give me pleasure. I hope that no pilgrim will ever report otherwise upon his journey hither. Have

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

you any complaint to make as to the treatment you have received in Medina?"

"None, your Highness. I have been everywhere I wished. I have received courtesy on every hand."

"God be praised. In my rule I follow the law of Islam. If a man steals his hand shall be cut off. If he does murder he shall lose his head."

The Emir then invited them into a smaller room. They sat upon the floor round a low table upon which rested an immense brass tray. In the centre of the tray was a roasted sheep, surrounded by a snowy mountain range of rice from which dates and vegetables protruded. In front of each place was a porcelain bowl containing half a gallon of camel's milk.

As soon as they had washed their hands in a brass pot brought round by a slave the Emir said:

"In the name of God and with the blessings of God." Then he exclaimed in a loud voice, "Come, fall to!" and tore off an enormous piece of mutton, far more than Chale could have eaten at a sitting. He, Getan, and Ibrahim Hamdi followed their host's example, and when they had eaten what they had they drank their half gallon of camel's milk together. Chale found his very sour.

The conversation turned upon the administration of the law.

"If we punish with severity it is for the good of the community," said the Emir, tearing off another hunk of mutton.

"Truly a weak ruler is a lattice-work which does not keep off the wind," commented Sheikh Getan, helping himself in turn.

HOLY MEDINA

"And now those Bedouins have learned to kiss the hand they cannot bite," declared the Emir with satisfaction.

By this time Chale had learned that Muslim good manners provided that no guest may cease eating until every one has finished, and he continued to nibble at his meat while the others devoured an enormous meal. Occasionally an official would come in with a message for the Emir, whereupon the guests politely turned away and continued the conversation among themselves. Then the slaves removed the tray, the Emir said grace, and his guests murmured the customary prayer for the host:

"O God, bless that which thou hast provided for him, and have mercy upon him."

They withdrew to the audience hall, where slaves brought coffee.

"God give you good reward," murmured Chale, as he took his cup from a tall Abyssinian negro.

The Emir fell into a genial mood.

"Have you ever heard, Haji Abdul Rahman," he asked, "the Arab story of the two old men who had been friends in youth and met again after many years?"

"No, your Highness, but indeed I should like to hear it."

"When they had saluted one another the elder began to inquire after his friend's state. 'How old are you now?' he asked. 'Thanks be to God, I am in good health,' replied the other. 'And are you well provided with worldly goods?' 'Thanks be to God, I am in debt to no man.' 'Is your mind at ease?' 'Thanks be to God, I have no children.' 'And have you any enemies?' 'Thanks be to God, I have no near relations.' "

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

The Emir joined loudly in the laughter of his guests, raising his hands and crying, "Wallah! But it is true!"

Then, in the Arab fashion, a serious mood followed swiftly on the heels of mirth.

The talk turned to religious and philosophical matters, and Chale soon found that besides being a man of action the Emir was, like every well-born Wahabbi, a man of scholarship. In this he knew there was nothing unusual. The teaching of the Koran kindles the desire for knowledge. From the earliest times the Arabs have devoted themselves to philosophy and the pursuit of learning, holding that ignorance is the greatest poverty, that a mind without education is like a brave man without arms, and that knowledge increases the honour of princes and brings men of low degree into the palaces of kings.

"Kings govern men," the Emir said with a courteous glance at Ibrahim Hamdi, "but learned men govern kings."

"Learned men are the trustees to whom God has confided mankind," agreed Sheikh Getan.

"And 'a seat of learning is a garden of heaven,'" quoted Chale.

The Emir looked pleased. He darted one of his quick glances at Chale.

"You are interested in these matters, Haji Abdul Rahman?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed. The day on which I have learned nothing is no part of my life."

"That is well said. Angels bend down their wings to a seeker after knowledge."

Chale told him of his intense interest in the library and spoke of Ibrahim Hamdi's courtesy.

HOLY MEDINA

"If then you seek knowledge, the lamp from which all men must light their candles, you may stay here as my guest for as long as you choose. I will get the most learned men in Medina to answer your questions, and you shall use the library as you will."

Chale thanked him with a full heart.

"Now, your Highness, I must return to my own country," he said, "but if God pleases, I shall return."

"Insh-a-Allah!" replied the Emir. "My house is open to you and to all scholars who are true believers. For he who seeks learning without study will attain his end when the raven becomes grey with age."

The next morning, after the daylight prayer, they passed through the city gates on the long road back to Jeddah. It was very hot, and the car behaved appallingly. Thirty miles along the road the back axle broke, but the Arab chauffeur succeeded in splicing it with a piece of wire, and they went on. By this time all four springs had gone, and the bumping and bouncing continually banged their heads against the hood. All roads in Arabia are lamentable, nor are they likely to be improved while pilgrims remain conservative, for most of them prefer to go by camel rather than by bus or car. Chale and Munirah would have conformed to the ancient tradition had there been time, and long before he reached Jeddah Chale would have gladly exchanged the Ford for a camel, even though it meant losing sixteen days.

The chauffeur had his head turned towards his garage and was intent on reaching it as soon as possible. His driving became fantastic. The outward journey had taught Chale that there was no rule of the road in Arabia, and that when one driver met another neither

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

would give way. They simply drove on at full speed and stopped with a jolt to avoid a collision. Then both drivers would jump out and argue. Usually one of the cars had reeled into the ditch beside the road, and every one would become suddenly friendly and help to pull it out. Even when they met no motor traffic the camels and sheep which wandered over the road would have presented an incessant peril, but the Arab swerved past them serenely.

They drove on nearly all night until, what with the bangs on his head and the buffetings on his body, Chale had become almost unconscious. At his urgent plea they camped for a few hours, and then careered onwards again. They passed parties of pilgrims busily digging out their lorries which had stuck in the loose sand, and the wreck of a car and a lorry which had collided. Several people had been killed and half a dozen hurt. They stopped the car and did what they could; then again started on their headlong course.

Before they reached Jeddah the car had to be dug out of the sand ten times.

"It is God's will!" Getan would gasp, as he struggled with Chale and Saleh to haul it backwards.

"This time we're stuck for good," Chale would say.

"If God wills, it will go, otherwise it won't," grunted Getan; his turban had fallen off, and his hair stood straight on end. Then, as the car began to move, he cried triumphantly, "There! It goes! Wallah! Didn't I tell you, brother, that it would go if God willed it? Thanks be to God!"

By the time they were within twenty miles of Jeddah everything that can break in a Ford car was broken. But

HOLY MEDINA

the car still moved. It crawled up the hills, went bumping and rattling down them, and at last limped into Jeddah at midnight with its four shaken passengers, waterless, spitting, and spluttering, with the springs and engine full of nails and wire and bits of wood.

Chapter XVI

AMIN

ON reaching Jeddah Chale and Munirah were entertained by Haji Abdul Majid, who had been Malayan Pilgrimage Officer to the Hedjaz for twelve years; a great gentleman, beloved by all Malays, with whose wife Munirah was on friendly terms. Pilgrims from all parts of Malaya go to him when in difficulties, and if one member of a party dies Haji Abdul Majid sees that his belongings and return ticket are properly disposed of. One day when Chale was visiting him at Mecca an old Malay from Perak came to ask for an endorsement so that he might obtain a refund on his wife's ticket.

Haji Abdul Majid asked him what had become of his wife.

"She is dead, thanks be to God!" replied the old man piously. "She died here in Mecca. What better death could one desire? Now I must complete my pilgrimage, and the passage money will help me to procure another wife."

By the time Chale and Munirah reached Jeddah again the pilgrim ship for Singapore had sailed, and so he booked two passages in a Swedish ship bound for the Malayan ports.

While waiting for her to sail he called on St John Philby, whom he had previously made a point of avoiding, not wishing to embarrass him. All he had heard had given him a great admiration for Philby, whose name, he

found, was known and honoured from one end of Arabia to the other, while, to his surprise, the name of Lawrence was forgotten by all but a few. Philby had never had Lawrence's romantic publicity, but Chale had come to realize that the pro-British trend of the Arabs in Arabia was largely due to Philby's constructive work. The Arabs recognized that they had him to thank for Hussein's downfall and Ibn Saud's success, which had brought peace and comparative prosperity to the country. Even his critics, Chale found, did not criticize his political intentions, but only speculated among themselves as to whether he were a true Muslim or not. The King had given him the agency for the State oil and motor monopolies, which placed great power and wealth in his hands, and the inevitable suspicion of the Arab mind had caused some to question his motive in abandoning his own religion for theirs. Chale had no doubt that he had adopted Islam because his close contact with the Arabs had convinced him that their faith was best, and, as he knew, the King certainly had not doubted his intentions.

During his brief call Chale was impressed by Abdullah Philby's modesty and integrity, and was interested to see that his mind had come to work as an Arab's rather than as a European's. He was grave, courteous, incurious, but immensely kind, and asked no embarrassing questions. He expressed his appreciation that Chale had not sought his help in trying to reach Mecca.

Next morning Sheikh Getan, Mohammed Saleh, and Mustapha Babli accompanied Chale and Munirah in the dhow that took them off to the ship. Chale was sorry to be saying good-bye to his Arabian friends. They had served him well. Their unconquerable optimism had

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

helped to keep his heart high during the bitter days of waiting in Jeddah. He was glad he had justified their confidence in him, glad at their unaffected delight that he had proved himself a true Muslim in the face of every test. He who so seldom wept found it hard to keep back his tears as he heard Getan say the parting words :

“ I give into the care of God your faith and your trust, and may good actions make provision for your journey. Farewell, brother. Peace be upon your going and the blessings of God.”

“ And peace be upon you and all your house,” said Chale, giving him his hand.

The dhow cast off. The anchor was weighed. The ship began to thread her way through the maze of coral reefs.

With Munirah at his side Chale watched the minarets of Jeddah growing smaller in the distance and thought of many things. In spite of every difficulty, he had done what he set out to do. By his struggle against adversity he had fulfilled himself, and by attaining his purpose he felt that he had achieved a spiritual victory which would sustain him all his life.

His choice of Munirah had been justified. He had taken her with him mainly to serve his own ends, but now she had grown dearer to him than he could have believed. She had been brave, uncomplaining, gentle, and, when need arose, most wise. She had fortified his own flagging courage when they were faced with disappointment, she had been gay when he had needed laughter, she had exulted with him in achievement. No man could have had a more gallant partner in a great adventure, a sweeter companion, or a more sagacious counsellor. They had shared everything. She had given

him much, but with her that counted as nothing. He had helped her to accomplish the desire of her life, and he knew that she was grateful to him, though she said little. Soon they must part. They had been through so much together that both would feel that parting. But he knew her well enough to be sure that there would be no sentimental scene. How deeply she cared for him he did not know. They had never made love, or spoken of love. Nor would they in the days to come. That was forbidden to them while they were returning from the pilgrimage. He would take her as far as Singapore, then see her safely to her own country. She would make no demands on him. They would part in peace, with affection and respect.

He pictured to himself her arrival back in Kuching. As the ship passed the signal station a thousand praus would come out to greet her, with streamers flying and gongs beating. Not only her own relatives and friends, but every Malay in Kuching would swarm on board to welcome her, glad and proud that she had reached Mecca and returned with the venerated title of haja.

His thoughts switched back across the years to the quarterdeck of a battleship in which he had served as a midshipman. The ship's company was parading for the investiture of a lieutenant-commander who had won the D.S.O. The flag-captain read out the bald official record of the act of gallantry. Before the Admiral pinned the medal on the officer's breast he said that although his Majesty had been pleased to confer the decoration on an individual, in a sense the honour was shared by the whole ship. It had just been the usual thing that every admiral, and every general, always did say on such an

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

occasion, but as Chale thought of the Malays who would be welcoming Munirah home he knew that was how they would be feeling. Each man and each woman there would be sharing her title, exulting in the glory of her attainment, almost as glad as if they had performed the Haj themselves.

He knew that for Munirah her home-coming would be the happiest day of her life. It would dispel any regrets she might have for him. There would be the procession from the wharf to her father's house, the distribution of the presents she had brought back with her, the doling out of the Zem Zem water in little tins and bottles, the snipping of the holy kiswah cloth into tiny pieces until nothing but single threads remained to give away.

All through the night, and for forty days afterwards, the rejoicings would go on: and Chale hoped that the effect of that home-coming would not end with the day of her return. He felt that if his own judgment had been right, that if he knew anything of Munirah herself, her example might bring the Malays of Sarawak back to the realities of Islam and make it once more a living force in their lives rather than a set of observances which, as he had seen, were becoming but perfunctorily performed. Men and women, particularly those of the East, live by example, good or bad. He looked to Munirah's example to spur more and more of her people to secure earthly happiness and spiritual comfort by making the pilgrimage themselves.

Some day he would join her and add his influence to hers. He knew that he might have to face misunderstanding of his motives, even hostility, from the Europeans: perhaps from the Rajah himself. That was

inevitable, and did not greatly matter. No one but a Muslim, no one who had not kissed the Black Stone at Mecca, felt the sting of the whirlwind of Arafat, or known the melancholy of the Medina graves, could rightly understand what was in his heart and what he desired to give those simple Malay people whom long ago he had come to love.

Yes, he would go back; but a wider horizon beckoned to him first. He had made his preparation, and his dream was with him still. The pilgrimage had shown him that he had been right in everything he had believed of Islam. It had proved to him that it was possible for humanity to unite in one vast international democracy, bound together in fraternity by a single code and a single faith. He was more sure than he had ever been that Islam was the greatest power for peace in the modern world. He was convinced that, if treated with integrity, the Muslims desired only peace. But he had learned that there was a sixth pillar of Islam of which Muslims rarely spoke: that if any of the Prophet's people were menaced the whole Muslim world must combine to help them. When he had left England every one had been talking of the menace of a European war. But he had not the slightest doubt that the real menace came from another quarter. Still far off, perhaps, but graver than anything that might happen in Europe.

That Islam should combine for war was unthinkable; yet it was possible, and Chale felt that only those who, like himself, understood the Muslim mind could estimate the danger: and they were few. It was the more necessary, then, that he should fulfil the duty for which the pilgrimage had fitted him: to play his part in using that

TRIUMPHANT PILGRIMAGE

vast brotherhood in the cause of peace, to help to weld Islam into one undivided faith again united by the simple teaching of the Koran, and to help Arabia to take her place in the modern world without destroying all it stood for in three hundred million Muslim hearts.

The way to Arabia, the way he had found so hard, was open to him now, when he chose to take it. No European, save Abdullah Philby, knew its secrets so intimately as he. He vowed that he would use for good the knowledge he had gained, both in the interests of Islam and of the West. His dream would not be accomplished in a day, he knew. He was prepared to devote his life to it. Indifference, rebuffs, ridicule, even contempt, he was prepared to face. He would be fortified by a saying he had heard long ago—"A candle, by consuming itself, gives light to others."

As the last minaret sank beneath the horizon he felt that he was starting on a new and even greater pilgrimage.

